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MANAGING OURSELVES: YOUNG PEOPLE,  
SOAP OPERA AND TECHNOLOGIES OF  
SELF-GOVERNMENT

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
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## Abstract

This study examines two television soap operas and their consumption by a select group of teenagers. The soap operas in question, *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*, are produced in Australia and watched by large audiences in the UK. The study's broadest aim is to discover the nature of the relationship between the programmes and their teenage viewers. In order to meet this aim, the study combines textual analysis and audience research.

Following a review of the textual analysis of soap opera, *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* are examined in detail as texts. The audience study is then introduced and located. The empirical study involved tape-recording interviews with groups of 13-16 year olds in one Edinburgh High School, and with individual teenagers in their own homes. In total, 50 teenagers were interviewed. The recurring findings of the audience study are analysed in detail.

The final two chapters of the thesis contextualize the findings and conclusions of the textual and audience studies. A selective genealogy is provided which theoretically locates *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* and their consumption as cultural practices in self-government. It is argued that the two programmes should be understood as integral parts of a broad but specific arena for learning.

It is argued that interviewees use *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* as cultural resources. They learn how to conduct themselves in intimate and social relationships, and, in particular, learn how to practise and reconstruct their gendered selves.

It is argued that the model of analysis elaborated is valuable because: it best explains the specific nature of *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* and their consumption; it provides a way of moving beyond something of an orthodoxy in soap opera analysis; and it avoids the binary logic of some recent arguments about popular culture and social change.



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## Introduction

This study began in October 1991 and has a number of motivations. The most obvious of these is the phenomenon that Australian soap operas generally, but *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* in particular, represented in British cultural life in the late-1980s and early 90s. Both programmes continue to attract large audiences and cultural commentary from a variety of sources, but arguably the turn of the 1980s is when their status as a phenomenon in UK culture was most clearly defined (Cunningham and Jacka, 1994).

This status was achieved quite rapidly. *Neighbours* was first broadcast in Australia in 1985, and in the UK, via BBC 1, in October of 1986. *Home and Away* began in Australia in 1988, and was first transmitted by Britain's independent regional broadcasters in February 1989. By the end of 1989, both programmes were consistently watched by British audiences in excess of 14 million (according to the BARB figures published in *The Guardian* and *Radio Times* in December 1989). Partly because of their rapid ratings success, they were also the objects of criticism, discussion and amusement across media and cultural spheres.

Like the discourses which surround most speedy phenomena, but for various reasons more so, the commentary which *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* attracted tended toward the singular and extreme. In the *Sun*, Conservative politician John Patten called for *Neighbours* to be banned, arguing that it dulled children's senses (reported in Buckingham, 1993a: 3). In the *Radio Times*, Germaine Greer attacked *Neighbours* for its sanitized, all-white, all-heterosexual, American dream-like quality (reported in Crofts, 1995). *The Guardian*

reported the belief of the chairman of one of Australia's major broadcasting companies that Britons loved *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* because they offered them a 'quick fix' of nostalgic racism (Culf, 1993). Educationalists criticised the BBC for prioritizing *Neighbours* over 'quality' children's fiction (O'Flynn, 1989); church leaders attacked *Neighbours* for undermining traditional family values (Simpson, 1992). Less prolific, but given just as high a profile were newspaper reports of schoolchildren and university students' love of *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*, and schoolteachers and university lecturers' beliefs in the cultural and educational value of the programmes (respectively: *Dundee Evening Telegraph* (8.12.87); Lightfoot, 1988; Dudman, 1988; and Ellam, 1988).

Such discourses are so familiar and so closely attached to deeply held assumptions about popular media, effects, value, nation, vulnerability and 'others' that simultaneously they are easy to dismiss and difficult to escape. The important point for this study was that *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* did attract such audience, public and media attention. Clearly, important connections of some sort were being made by the programmes with the lives and imaginations of British people. In a sense, and beyond the broad strokes of even the best journalism, it was the nature of these connections which this study sought to identify.

At one level the study does seek to account for the popularity of *Home and Away* and *Neighbours*, but with some qualifications. Firstly, even to aim to 'account for' or 'explain' the popularity of *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* is to enter into a particular understanding of the programmes and their audiences. That is, that - for he/she who poses the question - there is something incomprehensible about the



popularity of such (bad) cultural objects and that so many should want to consume them so often. This is the understanding that leads to even liberal-left broadsheets producing headlines like, "Popularity of Australian soaps blamed on British 'racism fix'" (*The Guardian*, 2.11.93). (While racism fix is questioned by being put in quotation marks, the unquoted blamed naturalizes the common sense feeling that it is culturally embarrassing or just wrong that *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* should be so popular.)

Secondly, the study proceeds on the understanding that there are some straightforward and quite mundane reasons for the popularity of *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*; but also that, as a number of theorists have indicated, the meaning of popularity is complicated (see Bennett, 1986 for one of the most helpful summaries). In a recent essay, Stephen Crofts summarises what he believes are the basic reasons for the popularity of *Neighbours* in the UK (Crofts, 1995). To varying degrees, most of Crofts' speculations are safe - the pleasures of 'dailiness', the importance of scheduling, active women, egalitarianism et cetera. They are also, however the ones that would probably be arrived at quickly by most students of media. Like another similarly oriented essay (Cunningham and Jacka, 1994), Crofts relies on journalism for a number of his speculations. As such they remain not only speculative, but also, as David Buckingham indicates, superficial (Buckingham, 1997: 352). The task for a study like this one, then, is not to dismiss Crofts' suggestions, but to ask what, for instance, is the historical and contemporary meaning of *Neighbours'* active women?; what is the nature of their activity?; and how do viewers of *Neighbours* respond to such representations?

The third caveat to make when noting that the study seeks to account for the popularity of *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* is that we cannot assume that ratings equal popularity in any simple sense. This is to repeat that popularity has no single or simple meaning. *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* will be watched by large audiences for similar, but sometimes quite different reasons. Like those of other researchers (for example, Hobson, 1982 and Ang, 1985), this study seeks to learn in which ways *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* are pleasurable for their viewers, but may want to, or consider that it has to, conceive of pleasure in different ways.

This points to another of the study's primary motivations - that is, to meet and respond to the growing body of academic work on soap opera. Soap opera research has been conducted for almost as long as the genre's existence (Allen, 1995: 5). The types of study related most closely to this one, though, are the analyses of soap opera conducted in media and cultural studies in the 1980s and 90s. In close relation to what has been termed the 'turn to ethnography' (see, for example, Moores, 1993: 1), soap opera became something of a privileged object in media and cultural studies in the 1980s. There are a number of reasons why soap opera was targeted. The most important of these is the profound influence of feminist research on academic studies of media and popular culture. The serious study of soap opera - along with, for example, melodrama, romance and domestic practices - was one of the ways in which a number of researchers sought to make good the neglect of female voices and feminine pleasures in analyses of the media.

This study, then, continues to support the belief in the importance of studying popular genres and their audiences. Its focus, however, is not specifically female consumers or



feminine pleasures. One straightforward reason for this is that the neglected voice that this study seeks to animate is that of young people. (1). In addition to this, though, the study is also a response to the changing nature of soap operas as they are conceived of and produced by broadcasters, and to shifts in the ways in which popular media are theorized in media and cultural studies.

As Christine Geraghty has indicated (Geraghty, 1991: 167), and as will be obvious to any regular viewer of soap operas on British terrestrial television, soap operas are no longer produced with mostly women viewers in mind. This study takes an interest, then, in how teenage girls and boys respond to a changing genre, and to two programmes targeted at young (as well as older) viewers of both genders. (2). The study is also driven by the need to re-theorize soap operas and their consumption. Partly this is because of the changing nature of the genre and its audiences. It is also, however, out of some dissatisfaction with what is described in the following chapter as a relative genre orthodoxy. It was felt that there was a need to move beyond this orthodoxy both because the analysis of soap opera generally had arrived at something of a cul-de-sac (as well the theorists to whom I refer in the latter stages of chapter 1, this feeling is supported by David Buckingham's recent review of two books on soap opera - Buckingham, 1997: 352), and because, as I indicate in chapter 2, the established modes of enquiry were seen to be in need of some revision as well as extension when applied to *Home and Away* and *Neighbours*.

The model of analysis elaborated in the course of the thesis is variously derived. It is generally underpinned, though, by the ideas of Michel Foucault. The study is informed generally by Foucault's influential theories of discourse,

knowledge and power, but more specifically by his concepts of government (Foucault, 1991) and technologies of the self (Foucault, 1988). Foucauldian ideas were considered to be the ones which best helped to explain the projects of *Home and Away* and *Neighbours*, as well as the ways with which the programmes are engaged. As is indicated in the following chapters, though, the framework elaborated is believed to be a generally useful way for thinking about not all but a number of parts of popular culture and the nature and meaning of their consumption. (Some of the limits of Foucault's theory, as well as the rationale for using a Foucauldian framework, are considered in the latter part of chapter 3.)

The model adopted is also considered to be one useful way of negotiating and avoiding the binary logic which continues to inform not only the journalistic discourses I refer to above, but also some academic analyses of media and their audiences. Although in recent years there has been a wealth of highly sophisticated analysis of popular media and their consumption, the entrenched notions that audience activity is either the effect of texts' dominant structures or the heroic resistance of the same, have, as David Buckingham indicates, been remarkably difficult to escape (Buckingham, 1993a and 1997). This study sees no need either to celebrate or defend the consumption of *Home and Away* and *Neighbours*. It is driven by the belief that empirical investigations are crucial to the continuing good health of media and cultural studies. As Buckingham notes, although in recent times some excellent audience work has been conducted - and despite some not always accurate criticism of both the quantity and nature of this work - media and cultural studies still has a lot of empirical work to do, and should always consider that it has a lot of empirical work to do (Buckingham, 1993a:

14). Crucially, this fieldwork should not only contribute to the paradigm's empirical base of knowledge but also to the development of theory and our understanding of media and culture generally.

The structure of the thesis is as follows. In chapter 1, a review is made of textual analyses of soap opera. The important features of key studies and the positions adopted by their authors are summarised. What is shared, as well as the differences between structuralist, reader-oriented, feminist and melodramatic analyses of soap opera is indicated. In the second section of the chapter, a critique is made of the preceding textual analyses. It is argued that in different ways structuralism continues to have a strong influence on the way in which soap opera is theorized. This, it is argued, is not the most useful way to think about contemporary television soap opera. It has also led to some rather orthodox ways of conceptualizing the genre and its consumption. The latter parts and conclusion of chapter 1 suggest ways in which we might 'uncouple' dominant conceptions of soap opera. It is argued that the genre should be understood as a stable but dynamic cultural site where a number of historical discourses and generic modes are re-articulated. The researcher's task, it is argued, is to begin to uncover the 'arena of learning' of which specific soap operas are a part. This is in order to better theorize both their historical and contemporary form and the meaning and nature of their consumption.

Chapter 2 is a textual analysis of *Home and Away* and *Neighbours*. Six episodes of the two programmes are broken down and examined in detail. The analysis considers the programmes' narrative and generic form, their representations of character and place, and the textual



invitations that are made to viewers. Following chapter 1, it is argued that established analyses of soap opera begin to explain the form of the two programmes, but that to identify what is special to them involves going beyond how the genre is conventionally understood. It is argued that, most directly, *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* share the form of the comic strip and problem page. The narrative project in which the two programmes take the greatest interest is the reflexive self. This is indicated by *Home and Away* and *Neighbours'* form and content, and by the programmes' primary invitations - know yourself, transform yourself.

In the third section of chapter 2, specific examples of these invitations are examined in detail, and it is argued that the narrative cues offered to viewers are simultaneously invitations to practise skills in self knowledge and management. In chapter 2's conclusion, it is argued that the textual analysis confirms the arguments made latterly in the preceding chapter; that is that *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* should be understood as part of broad but interrelated 'matrix of tutelage', and as situated cultural practices. To support and illustrate this argument, the chapter closes with some recent historical and contemporary examples of popular entertainments which articulate and invite readers to enter into the same 'structure of relations' as *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*.

Chapter 3 details the methods used in the empirical study and the rationale for their selection. Chapter 4 summarizes the findings which recurred in the study's interviews and provides a selection of representative quotes and passages from the tape-recorded sessions.

Chapter 5 is an analysis of the study's interviews. The

first two sections consider two of the predominant organising themes of interviewees' responses - realism and characters. In these sections the specific nature of interviewees' understanding of *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*'s realism and characters is considered. Their responses are also compared to the similar ones offered to other researchers of soap opera audiences. It is argued that respondents' assessments of realism and character frequently are closely related. The programmes and the narratives are considered to be most real when the personalities of characters and their behaviour are deemed authentic. Following the arguments of the preceding chapters, respondents' assessments of realism and character are shown to be forms of cultural practice. Interviewees use the programmes as resources - resources by which they practise and refine skills in self-management. The third section of chapter 5 looks at general and specific instances of this practice and argues that quite coherent positions are taken up by interviewees. At different stages, interviewees are liberal and conservative, reactionary and utopian. The identities which hold these moves together more than any, it is argued, are gendered ones. The final section of the chapter reflects briefly on the interview process.

Chapter 6 is a selective genealogy of the techniques of self-government practised by *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* and by the study's interviewees. It places these mundane, contemporary practices within a theoretical and historical context. The chapter is not an exhaustive survey. It indicates some of the important parts of the historical dimension of the 'matrix of tutelage' referred to in preceding chapters. The chapter begins with brief reference to Foucauldian theories of history and government. Here it is also suggested that, although occurring in a very

different social and historical context, the basic form of the techniques practised by *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* and the study's interviewees in fact has some ancient antecedents.

The following two sections of chapter 6 examine popular entertainments and consumer cultures which span the last three hundred years. The analysis does not detail narrative or historically dramatic links. The important continuities it identifies are thematic and theoretical. The theorists to whom reference is made generally share a Foucauldian understanding of history and the modern period. They also share the belief that particular discourses become most persuasive when they are practised across a number of related spheres. In this respect, chapter 6 continues the argument of the preceding ones that *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* and the responses of interviewees must be understood as part of an interdiscursive network; and begins to map out some of the conditions that have made their common sense practices possible.

The final section of the chapter considers the important part played in this century by the new 'psy-sciences' in extending the modern regime of self-government. It continues the chapter's general emphasis on the importance of the social sciences and their impact on public and private life. It also shows how, at all levels, the family and domestic sphere were given paramount status as sites of expert knowledge and desire in the decades following the second world war.

The final chapter of the thesis, chapter 7, reiterates the important arguments and findings of the study. It argues that *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* and the responses of



interviewees must be understood as part of a general but finite historical regime - a regime in which entrenched discourses remain persuasive and in which new discourses and realities emerge. The opening section of the chapter combines and underlines the findings of the preceding ones. It also introduces some of the recent theories and research of contemporary practices of self-government and considers how they relate to this study's arguments. In particular, section 1 considers the meaning of contemporary gender relations and identities as they emerge and are discussed in the course of the study.

In section 2 some other recent studies are introduced in order to extend the argument that the techniques in self-government identified by this thesis are practised generally and arguably increasingly in the contemporary period. The question of the importance of ethnic and class differences is raised, and speculatively but with the support of other research it is argued that self-government is a normalized practice across ethnic and class groups.

In the final, concluding section of chapter 7, this argument is modified. It is argued that the contemporary regime of self-government cannot be thought of as being in itself particularly liberating or repressive. This, it is argued, is to make both an historical and theoretical reduction. Instead we must think of self-reflection and government as one of the primary ways in which different individuals and groups make sense of their lives and experiences at a number of levels. The extent to which individuals are able and enabled to make meaningful and productive choices will depend on the material realities of the social and cultural spheres they occupy.

This is how the study has been organised and written up as a thesis. With hindsight it is difficult to determine which part of the study influenced and led to another and when. The thesis that is developed results from close and on-going studies of *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*, the interview transcripts, and the appropriate academic literature. Each of these informed the others repeatedly and at different stages.

#### Footnotes

1. Since the start of this study there have been some valuable additions to the empirical study of young people's consumption of media and culture: see Buckingham (1993c), Gillespie (1995) and Thornton (1995).

2. It is often noted that *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* are aimed at young people. Obviously, the nature of the programmes and their location in the broadcasting schedules mean that to a large extent this is the case. We should bear in mind, though, both that 'young people' is a broad and arguably expanding category, and that viewers in their mid-late teens are known to be one of the most difficult groups for broadcasters to attract consistently. With regard to the viewing figures for *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*, I have read reports which indicate, respectively, that schoolchildren, university students and the over-60s are the largest viewing groups for the two programmes; and it is difficult if not impossible to corroborate any of these claims by referring to the selective breakdowns of national and regional viewing figures I have been sent by BARB. What is important for this study is that schoolchildren of all ages watch the programmes in large numbers; and that this is reflected in the substance of *Home and Away* and *Neighbours*, and to some extent is a reflection of that substance.

## Chapter 1: *Textual analyses of soap opera*

In this chapter I will consider some of the textual analyses of soap opera which have been most influential in media and cultural studies. To some extent, these textual studies follow the broad moves within the paradigm - from structuralism to post-structuralism, and the increasing and profound influence of feminist research generally. Feminism and a broad dissatisfaction with the limits of structuralist theory both contributed to the general emphasis on the importance of reading activity in the analysis of popular texts. In this respect, the analyses of Gillian Swanson (1981) and Richard Paterson and John Stewart (1981), which I consider initially, might be thought of as the dying embers of a broad trend in intellectual thought which greatly influenced the analysis of literature, film and popular culture, and reached the height of its authority in Europe (especially France) in the 1960s and Britain in the 1970s. Swanson, as I note, is one of the very few theorists who retains in her analysis a conventionally structuralist understanding of soap opera's form and effectivity.

However, following a review of structuralist, post-structuralist and feminist analyses of the genre, I argue that the primary ways in which the key studies attempt to move on from structuralism continue to be informed in important ways by its logic. A search for deep structures and hidden meanings is still made in some analyses; and at points there is a danger that rather than advances in theory and understanding being made, dominant structures and effects are replaced, only, by complex narratives and productive readers.



In the latter parts of the chapter, I suggest some ways in which we might move beyond what has become something of an orthodoxy in the textual analysis of soap opera. I introduce some of the concepts which inform the textual analysis made of *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* in the following chapter, and which are developed in the course of the thesis. That is, I argue that *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* should be investigated and theorized not only as soap operas, but as parts of a broad network of meaning where a number of related discourses and generic modes combine and are re-articulated. (1).

## 1. Complex narratives and productive readers

### (i) Structuralism

Gillian Swanson's textual study of *Dallas* is one of the few thoroughgoing structuralist analyses of soap opera. Swanson introduces her study by noting that despite the establishment of structuralism as a valuable method for film analysis, soap opera in this respect has been neglected (Swanson, 1981: 32). Soap opera's narrative form, Swanson notes, is less linear, less oriented to dramatic conclusion than other texts. The genre, she argues, mixes linearity and non-linearity. It depends on internal structural relations which integrate themselves along horizontal and vertical axes. Because of this, Swanson believes that a Levi-Straussian analysis can be more usefully applied to *Dallas* than a Proppian one. Levi-Strauss' ideas can reveal the programme's "latent content through a model of binary oppositions and bundles of relations identifying conflict and opposition as motivating elements underlying the narrative. These play themselves out in a non-linear network

of relations which cross-refer and form bundles of relations revealing a concealed and non-sequential deep structure, acting as a paradigm for other examples of the 'myth'..." (ibid.).

The key oppositions which propel *Dallas* and lie below its surface, argues Swanson, organise themselves around the themes of family, business and stereotype. The programme's characters exist in tensions between their familial and non-familial roles, their stereotypical and non-stereotypical roles, and in the struggle between the imperatives of business and domesticity (Swanson, 1981: 33). Narrative movement results from these tensions, from what Swanson argues is a series of negative impulses (ibid., p.83). Swanson argues that this structure effects a particular relation between *Dallas* and its viewers. (2). They are afforded a relatively superior position of knowledge to the text's characters which results in an ironic and voyeuristic disposition/reading. This position, Swanson argues, is complicit and illusory - it pretends to afford viewers a critical distance from which to observe the text's mythical function, while in fact concealing and naturalizing it:

"(I)rony acts in *Dallas* as a dominant discourse...reinforcing ideological processes implicit in the systems of opposition...and cementing the positionality of the audience in relation to the text...(W)hile we are apparently invited to inspect the construction of the 'form', the ideological model being set up is reinforced by dispossessing the spectator of his analytical position at precisely the point where he may perceive the underlying motivation of the construction." (p.82).

*Dallas*, then, Swanson argues, is an illusory text. It offers false solutions to ideological contradiction and in so doing affirms dominant ideas (Swanson, 1981: 85). The programme's narrative structure predetermines the spectator's position (ibid., p.83). That no other theorists have made such forceful claims regarding the textual effectivity of soap opera may not be an indication that Swanson is unwise to have applied Strauss' ideas to the genre. In anticipation of more detailed criticism, it might be as much a sign of the diminution of faith in particular ways of conceiving of ideology and its operations in the 1980s in media and cultural studies. The types of opposition which Swanson identifies as playing a key part in *Dallas*' narrative regime, I would argue, remain generally important to an analysis of that programme and other soap operas. It is their limits, changes and, especially, the effects Swanson affords the text's structure with which I would, and later in this chapter will take issue.

Paterson and Stewart's binary analysis of *Coronation Street* shows that Levi-Strauss' ideas can help to explain soap's characteristic form, but that they might best be thought of only as a starting point. *Coronation Street*'s narratives, Paterson and Stewart argue, are organised around three major oppositions - in or out of the community, in or out of work, and male or female (Paterson and Stewart, 1981: 84). At stages, other oppositions may be mapped onto these ones - for example and especially class difference. Paterson and Stewart argue that a Levi-Straussian model allows them to "interrupt the smooth surface of the text" in order to show how the programme's major themes and oppositions are counterpointed, interwoven and always ultimately recovered



within the serial's referential field - that is, a very particular and nostalgic notion of a North of England, working-class community (ibid., p.84ff).

Paterson and Stewart's conclusions are more circumspect and markedly different to those of Swanson. The work that the text does to make real, affirm a particular myth will also at times, argue Paterson and Stewart, reveal real tensions and divisions in British society (p.98). Though *Coronation Street's* sense and myth of community always underpins and unites its complicated narratives and tensions, this does not mean that only one, coherent position is offered to its viewers:

"No one set of attitudes and values is privileged...but a range of often contradictory positions is offered...Pleasures in the text come not simply from the solving of enigmas through various snares but from deploying an ever-increasing knowledge of this mythic reality...While it has proved possible to delineate the oppositions at work...the possibility of differential appropriation by different members of the audience makes it, as Lovell indicates, an interesting and sometimes progressive site of cultural accumulation." (Paterson and Stewart, 1981: 97-98).

Thus, while they employ a structuralist model of analysis, Paterson and Stewart would seem to anticipate the moves in the academic analysis of soap opera and popular culture more fully than Swanson. As they note, they are supported by Terry Lovell in this respect. Lovell's essay, which appears in the same collection as that of Paterson and Stewart, is prescient, and represents, I think, an important bridge between structuralist analyses of (predominantly) film in the 1970s and post-structuralist analyses of popular culture (not least soap opera) in the 1980s.

Lovell's aims are different in important ways to those of Paterson and Stewart. She questions the usefulness of ideology - the predominant ways in which it has been theorized in cultural studies - for an analysis of popular entertainments like *Coronation Street*. Not only, she argues, have concepts of ideology been applied too broadly and readily to a variety of parts and levels of society and culture, but particular types of popular culture may demand special modes of analysis (Lovell, 1981: 40ff). *Coronation Street* and other parts of popular culture, Lovell argues, connect with class and gender-based experiences which theories of ideology cannot fully explain. She follows Raymond Williams in suggesting that, in this respect, a more productive route may be to ask what are the structures of feeling and sensibility reproduced by popular texts and engaged with by audiences (ibid., p.44).

These sensibilibites, Lovell argues, are both aesthetic and emotional structures. In suggesting how we might begin to analyse them she makes an important move away from Swanson and Paterson and Stewart's rationales and film and anthropological influences:

"It might be thought that this (suggested mode of analysis) is...no more than has already been said in the 'cracks and fissures' approach, for instance that of *Cahiers*...But the oppositional valences of popular culture are not treasure buried in the depth of the text...They are very much more on the surface of the text, part of the staple pleasures which popular culture affords its audience." (Lovell, 1981: 52).

Despite or contrary to Paterson and Stewart's concluding remarks regarding the progressive potential of popular

culture, Lovell is not concerned to retrieve from popular culture that which has been repressed by ideology. Popular entertainments are not heroic. Rather she wants to argue that no text should be thought of as ideologically unified; no text, as it were, ties up all its ends, silences all its contrary voices: "(T)ypically more is thrown into play...than is ever resolved..." (ibid., p.50).

(ii) *Reader-oriented poetics*

In various ways, the spirit of Lovell's arguments is evident in most of the key textual studies of soap opera published in the 1980s. Her notion of the sensibilities and structures of feeling peculiar to particular texts is taken up, especially, by feminist studies of soap opera, to which we will return. (3). More generally and in tandem with theorists of other parts of popular culture, soap analysts met Lovell's argument that particular texts demanded special modes of study, beyond if not divorced from broad theories of ideology. The notion of the plural not singular nature of reading activity, and over-determined not determinate nature of texts' structures guided a number of soap studies. Prominent among these are those soap analyses influenced by post-structuralist literary studies.

In his reader-oriented study of soap opera, Robert Allen argues that the genre employs so many codes simultaneously as to render it complex and "overcoded" (Allen, 1985: 91). To understand the complicated interaction between soap operas and their viewers, Allen draws on the school of literary study least impressed by traditional and structuralist methods of interpretation and most influenced by phenomenology (for the genesis of his methods see Allen,



1987: 74-81). The meaning of the soap opera text does not lie hidden in its structure (a notion that at one level informs the analyses of Swanson (1981) and Paterson and Stewart (1981), above). Rather, the text is only given meaning, only becomes a text in the process of its reading: "Each work is therefore regarded only as a manifestation of an abstract and general structure, of which it is but one of the possible realizations." (Todorov, quoted in Allen, 1985: 62).

Allen argues that soap opera is especially inviting of a phenomenological, reader-oriented model of analysis because of the high degree of interpretive work the genre demands of its readers. Those unfamiliar with soap opera (or a particular text) would have difficulty making coherent meaning from its characteristic form. This is because, Allen argues, drawing on structural linguistics, the genre is unusual in both its paradigmatic complexity and syntagmatic openness (Allen, 1985: 69). That is, with regard to the former, a soap opera's extensive history, large cast and multiple, interconnected narratives make its "reservoir of relational possibilities" deeper than is the case for "any other narrative form" (ibid., p.72). Even when narrative progress seems sloth-like or redundant, readers can take pleasure in or work hard at reading back and across the text. They piece together a complicated network of associations and are able to recognise the historical significance (within the world of the soap) of the most mundane of gestures and exchanges. The genre's latter feature - syntagmatic openness - is related to this former one. Soap's episodic, interrupted and unresolved form, Allen argues, means that it creates greater protensive or narrative indeterminacy than is the case for many other types of narrative (p.77). So despite a viewer's extensive

narrative knowledge and generic expertise, because soap opera "is not governed by an ultimate telos...(its) protensive possibilities always outrun plot resolutions." (Allen, 1985: 82).

Allen's generic analysis is generally accurate and valuable. His sanguineness regarding the complexity and openness of soap opera and the high productivity of its viewers (writerly readers), though, invites criticism. He indicates his own awareness of the limits of reader-oriented analysis and what has motivated him to apply it to soap opera. Soap opera's textual strategies demand particular types of reading competency in the same way that literary works do, Allen argues. He wants this to be recognised because of the low cultural status of the genre and its readers. Even in the most liberal of reader-oriented literary criticism the implied or model reader remains a male, educated, European figure - indiscernible, that is, from the critic (ibid., p.91). Connecting with Lovell's arguments regarding the specific sensibilities demanded of popular culture, Allen suggests that soap may expect competencies that are related to class and especially gender, rather than formal education. In a later essay, Allen notes that for some the move to reader-oriented analysis may represent a feint rather than a critical shift (Allen, 1987: 98). Given that the reader remains an abstract concept, how different, really, is reader-led analysis from traditional literary criticism?: "Has he (Wolfgang Iser, a leading proponent of the method) merely replaced 'the' meaning of a text with a slightly more liberal notion of 'instructions for meaning production'?" (ibid., p.99).

Allen also notes that how determinate a text's form is of meaning remains a difficult question. The value for him of

reader-led analysis is the emphasis it puts on the interaction between a text's horizons and those of its reader. Which of these sides of the negotiation is privileged may be dependent on how the model is utilised. Its application has been so various that it might be better to think of it as a broad field of inquiry (concomitant with the move to post-structuralism and the 'death of the author') rather than a specific method. This suggestion, I think, is welcome. Allen's reader-oriented model, emerging as to some extent it does from phenomenology, is in danger of remaining a naive or descriptive method only. As such, if by implication only, it does tend to empty out or neglect the historical and social nature of soap opera consumption.

Allen notes that reader-led analysis has been used to formulate theories of the social and cultural interpretive communities within which texts operate, and of how they are always historically 'encrusted', given meaning by the discourses they inherit and which surround them. (Allen, 1987: 100ff). This latter idea, indeed, Allen pursues himself in another part of his extensive study of soap opera (Allen, 1985: chapter 6). The extent of *Speaking of Soap Opera's* effort to get to the heart of what characterizes the genre, however, may be its weakness as well as its strength. Generally, as I have suggested, it is an accurate and valuable study. Its findings, though, are difficult to apply beyond the level of the general and introductory; and Allen's reader-oriented poetics of soap opera (chapter 4) is an acute example of this weakness. For some soap operas, its introduction to what is special to them may be briefer still than is the case for others - *Home and Away* and *Neighbours*, I will later argue, being good examples.

In distinction to Allen, a second reader-oriented critic,



David Buckingham, applies a model of analysis to *EastEnders* which remains sensitive to the special features of that programme. Indeed, Buckingham's analysis of *EastEnders* is so close and sustained that we might call it Barthesian - Barthes' (1974) analysis of Balzac's *Sarrasine* being the clearest analogy and one of the works on which Buckingham draws (Buckingham, 1987: 61). In keeping with Allen's analysis, Buckingham argues that while narrative progress may be slow in *EastEnders*, for regular viewers interpretive demands remain high. *EastEnders* in fact succeeds in appearing to be narratively pacy, says Buckingham, because of the density of its narratives and characters and their interrelationships. The depth of its "reservoir of relational possibilities" (Allen, 1985: 72) and the extent of its narrative interweaving is what distinguishes *EastEnders* from other soap operas (Buckingham, 1987: 54). The demands made on viewers are great, and they must be "extraordinarily flexible" in their responses:

"Simply in order to make sense of what takes place, viewers have to assemble the different narrative strands out of the series of fragments they are shown. They must be able to recollect what has gone before, draw inferences about the characters' motivations and states of mind, and imagine events which have not been shown, in order to 'fill the gaps' between scenes. In addition, the narrative provides a series of cues which invite the viewer to 'move' in a number of directions at once: forwards, to predict future developments; backwards, to recall past events; and across, to connect and compare the storylines." (ibid., p.60).

Buckingham also argues that *EastEnders* becomes meaningful because of its intertextuality and encrustations. It invites viewers to recognise the employment of generic forms other than soap opera. It utilises, in particular, the codes of comedy and melodrama, and in doing so seems to enjoy pointing to its fictional status (Buckingham, 1987: 74).

This is one of a number of ways, Buckingham argues, in which viewers are flattered by the text, made to feel distant from it, masterful over it. Buckingham's analysis in this respect connects with Swanson's (1981) notion of voyeurism. The privileged narrative knowledge *EastEnders'* viewers are afforded over the programme's characters enables them to look down and feel superior in the judgements and speculations they make (ibid., pp.64-65). Like Swanson, Buckingham notes that this position often engenders irony. It also, though, can be a masochistic as well as masterful position, foreseen crises and tensions unfolding before viewers and beyond their control. Suffering, Buckingham argues, motivates *EastEnders'* narratives (p.104).

However, Buckingham does not go as far as Swanson to argue that *EastEnders'* viewers' enjoyment of irony and relative mastery distracts them from the text's deeper myths and ideology. They are, he argues, more aware, and made more aware of its realist conventions than such an argument would suggest: "The text invites the viewer to play a game with characters' lives and destinies: and viewers know that it is, in the end, just a game." (Buckingham, 1987: 69). This said, Buckingham does at points seem to repeat some of the structuralist arguments to which I made reference earlier. Like Paterson and Stewart, he argues that *EastEnders'* ostensible, 'foregrounded' events are given meaning by its major 'background' themes - family and community (ibid., p.87). These, Buckingham argues, in the fashion of myths, provide the internal referents for and condense the broader social tensions which are at stake in the programme. "The fundamental reasons for...the instability (of the family), for example, are contained within it." (p.104); and "women's 'protest against oppression' (is confined) to the level of interpersonal relationships with men." (p.111).

Buckingham does not argue, though, that *EastEnders* functions only to recuperate particular ideas. Its structure, his analysis suggests, is more negotiative than this. The family and especially masculinity, he argues, are, within the text's terms, as much troubled as affirmed. Usefully, and in what I think is a subtle but important move away from Swanson's notion of soap's structural effects, Buckingham suggests that it may be this negotiative narrative process with which *EastEnders*' viewers identify (rather, that is, than with its characters) (Buckingham, 1987: 82).

(iii) *Feminine competencies*

The idea that soap opera's viewers identify with rather than are positioned by the genre's characteristic structures is important to the feminist textual analyses of soap published in the 1980s. As I noted earlier, in her analysis of *Coronation Street* Terry Lovell suggests that female viewers in particular might recognise the structures of feeling reproduced by the programme (Lovell, 1981). Lovell's suggestions are precisely that - an introduction to possible theoretical moves. However, at around the same time (late-1970s, early 1980s) Tania Modleski considered the same broad idea, and, to some influence, gave it considerable elaboration and political force.

In the introduction to the second of her two essays on soap opera (which is the fourth chapter of Modleski's *Loving with a Vengeance* (1982) and extends the ideas of her 1979 essay), Modleski states that the aim of her analysis is not to ignore what may be 'feminine' about soap operas, but to focus upon it (Modleski, 1982: 87). Like Robert Allen, she



pits her analysis against denigrators of soap and popular commercial pleasures, but goes beyond this. Soaps, she argues, provide a valuable counter to the dominant, masculine patterns of (Western, European) culture. They play a part in the formulation of an emergent feminist aesthetics, and as such "may be in the vanguard not just of TV art but of all popular narrative art." (ibid.).

In distinction to classical narratives and men's experience, Modleski argues, soap opera's fragmented, repetitive and unresolved structure reveals a "deep truth about the way women function in...culture: as both moral...guides and household drudges" (Modleski, 1982: 101). Soap's interrupted form connects closely with women's domestic labour, and this provides a major part of its pleasure and meaning for female viewers. Soap's characteristic mode of engagement, Modleski argues, is one of distraction. This not only connects with feminine structures of feeling, but is indicative of broader changes in modern popular culture. In this latter respect, Modleski explicitly diverges from Raymond Williams' influential notion of television flow (Williams, 1974) and draws on the ideas of Walter Benjamin. Soap opera and popular television, argues Modleski, depend upon the principle of interruptibility and reproduce a "profoundly decentering experience" for their viewers (ibid., p.100). This, she says, is in contradistinction to Williams' theory that flow is television's central experience. More usefully, Modleski argues, Benjamin suggested that modern popular forms - films, fairs - trained their consumers in the "art of being off center" (p.100). They became sensible, were mastered, Benjamin argues, in a state of distraction, and were appropriated more out of habit than attention



(Modleski, 1982: 101-103, and see Benjamin, 1936/1973). Television and especially soap opera, Modleski argues, take this modern tendency to new heights (Modleski, 1979: 73).

Modleski draws on the work of a number of feminist theorists to argue that soap opera connects with women's sexual, social and psychological conditions and needs. Like female sexuality, soap opera is "open-ended, slow-paced, multi-climaxed" (Modleski, 1982: 98). The genre, Modleski argues, feeds on modern women's fears of social isolation (ibid., p.108). The twentieth century witnesses the fragmentation of local communities and families, of the support networks on which women depended. Soap operas provide women with immortal, extended families, and meet their collective need for and fantasy of community (p.108). It is precisely the dysfunctional nature of the soap operatic family, argues Modleski, which secures its affirmation, and which means it will always be there for its female viewers: "As long as the children are unhappy, as long as things don't come to a satisfying conclusion, the mother will be needed as confidante and adviser, and her function will never end." (Modleski, 1982: 90).

Modleski argues here both that soap operas construct their viewers as ideal mother figures, and that the good mother figures in soaps play a central part in this process. Soap's ideal mothers are always needed. The happiness of all of the family's members is the summit of their ambitions and desires. And, says Modleski, they are always necessarily shown to be ineffectual in achieving this aim. Contrary to masculine narratives and ideals, soaps insist on the insignificance and fallibility of individuals. They invite

multiple identifications; and soap's viewers/mother figures are constituted as "egoless receptacle(s) for the suffering of others" (ibid., p.94).

Modleski's arguments are highly persuasive, and have been valuable and influential in the analyses of soap opera which followed her two essays. However, their force also invites criticism. Before a more detailed critique of Modleski's (and others') analysis, we should note the criticism that it has attracted most frequently. That is, that Modleski does tend to conflate her textually inscribed mother figure with what may be quite or very different real viewers. Charlotte Brunsdon's analysis of *Crossroads*, while sharing the thrust of Modleski's argument, indicates how we might begin to surmount such problems.

Though much shorter than Modleski's analysis, Brunsdon's essay is in many ways more incisive. *Crossroads* does appeal to particular feminine skills, argues Brunsdon, and we should think of these skills as repertoires of cultural knowledge (Brunsdon, 1981: 36). They are "discourses of maternal femininity which are elaborated elsewhere, already in circulation and brought to the programme by the viewer." (ibid., p.37). In this sense, they are not of course the natural attributes of femininity, but under "present cultural and political arrangements" it is more likely that female viewers will possess them (p.36). (4). Like Modleski, Brunsdon argues that the competencies appealed to by *Crossroads* concern themselves with personal and familial relationships - "training in reading...people" (Modleski, 1982: 100).

Brunsdon also follows Modleski in arguing that because soap opera shows all of its characters to be fallible, a

potential moral equality is presented (Brunsdon, 1981: 36). However, Brunsdon makes a subtle but I think important move away from Modleski's ideas when she argues that despite this moral equality "the notion of individual character is central" to soap opera (ibid.). Rather than insisting on the insignificance of individual life (Modleski, 1982: 91), soap repeatedly asks, and invites its viewers to ask, "What kind of a person is this?" (p.36). In so doing, Brunsdon argues, soap also asks its viewers to judge what is or is not acceptable behaviour within the province of personal relationships. What kind of a person is this?, and Have they behaved in the 'right' way? is what soap asks its viewers to consider, simultaneously, in its characteristic narrative gaps. *Crossroads*, then, should be thought of as a morality drama. It is in the business "not of creating narrative excitement, suspense, delay and resolution, but of constructing moral consensus about the conduct of personal life." (Brunsdon, 1981: 35).

These ideas, I will argue, are important regarding the ways with which *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* are engaged. They also begin to lead us away from rather singular notions of soap engagement and gendered competency. The notion of an interrupted narrative structure is as important to Brunsdon as it is to Tania Modleski. In giving greater attention to Modleski's 'training in reading people', however, Brunsdon gives less emphasis to the relation between soap's discontinuous structure and the nature of femininity, and more to the specific and discursive nature of the engagements which viewers make in soap's narrative interruptions. Soap opera's viewers, she argues, are asked to make the same types of evaluation of fictional characters as the characters make of each other:



"I am thus arguing that *Crossroads* textually implies a feminine viewer to the extent that its textual discontinuities require a viewer competent within the ideological and moral frameworks, the rules, of romance, marriage and family life to make sense of it." (ibid., p.37).

While she privileges a similar notion of femininity to Modleski, then, Brunsdon's emphasis on the cultural and discursive nature of the competencies invited by soap opera is more productive, I think, than Modleski's focus on the anti-progressive (and so progressive) structure of the genre.

In the afterword to her 1982 essay, Modleski underlines how convinced she is of this latter theory. She draws on the work of Pierre Macherey in arguing that the notion of contradiction is central to the soap opera genre and her theorization of it. Contrary to high art and established critics' interpretation of it, soap "derives its form from...incompleteness which enables us to identify the active presence of conflict at its borders." (Macherey, quoted in Modleski, 1982: 111). On its manifest level, Modleski argues, soap opera "whole-heartedly embraces" patriarchal myths and institutions (ibid., p.113). However,

"(i)t is useless to deplore the texts for their omissions, distortions, and conservative affirmations. It is crucial to understand them: to let their very omissions and distortions speak, informing us of the contradictions they are meant to conceal and, equally importantly, of the fears that lie behind them. For the texts often do speak profoundly to us, even those of us who like to think we have shed our 'false consciousness' and are actively engaged in challenging patriarchal authority." (Modleski, 1982: 113).

(iv) *Tragic melodrama*

In her analysis of *Dallas*, Ien Ang is similarly motivated to Modleski and shares a number of her theories. (5). For instance, Macherey's notion of structured absences clearly supports Ang's theory of *Dallas*' melodramatic imagination (Ang, 1985: chapter 2). *Dallas* and soap opera, argues Ang, should be considered heightened forms of melodrama because of the way they repeatedly point up contradiction. If previous types of melodrama were praised for their inability to resolve the contradictions they raised in the course of their narratives - despite or because of the contrivedness of concluding attempts - then soap opera, making no attempt at resolution, should be considered especially melodramatic (Ang, 1985: 76ff). Further, Ang argues that in *Dallas* there is always meaning beyond the level of narrative and dialogue, an excess of meaning figured visually by the text. Facial close-ups and mise-en-scene are used melodramatically: "The status of the spoken word is...relativized...The essence of a situation is not expressed, but lies as it were concealed behind the facial expression of the character...at the end of a scene" (ibid., p.73). And, relatively independent of the narrative, "the *mise-en-scene* in itself produces a chronic contradiction." (p.78).

Like Modleski, Ang argues that for women especially *Dallas* may represent a fantasy of powerlessness:

"Must (might) we see an imaginary identification with the tragic and masochistic positions of Sue Ellen or Pamela as a form of 'oppression in ourselves', a patriarchal 'remnant' that unfortunately women still have to hark back to because feminism has not yet developed any effective alternatives?" (Ang, 1985: 133).

Ang's theory of *Dallas*' tragic structure of feeling is based on the letters she received from (predominantly female) regular viewers, and the programme's structure with which she argues the viewers identify. The excessiveness of *Dallas*' rise and fall conflictual structure, says Ang, is recognised as tragic by viewers. The structure repeatedly ensnares the programme's characters. All are victims; none are afforded a transcendent position in, or mastery over the narrative. Each character is doomed to exist in "the prison of an eternal conflictual present." (Ang, 1985: 75). Like Swanson, Ang argues that *Dallas*' characters are allowed to be happy neither within the family nor in their attempts to escape it. Characteristic to the genre, notes Ang, viewers possess a greater knowledge of narrative events than characters. While this plus the lack of a protagonist affords viewers multiple points of identification, they are nonetheless as impotent as the characters: "(A) total instability of behavioural codes prevails in *Dallas*, so that neither the characters themselves nor the viewers know where they stand." (Ang, 1985: 76). Like Modleski, Ang argues that *Dallas* repeatedly points to the insignificance of individual life.

Also in keeping with Modleski's ideas, Ang argues that *Dallas*' tragic, melodramatic structure is so recognisable to some viewers because of the fragmented nature of modern society and culture. The text's structure is metaphorical of life's torments and speaks directly to the imagination of the public (ibid., p.64). Ang follows Brunsdon to note that some, especially female viewers will be more competent, will recognise this structure of feeling more readily (p.79). She also notes that it is not within the scope of her study to historically locate such a sensibility (p.66), and draws



instead on the work of Peter Brooks (1976) to support her thesis. Brooks' ideas are attractive to Ang because they move away from classical notions of tragedy and realism. The certainty of these canons is no longer founded. The melodramatic, argues Brooks, is "a form of the tragic...for a world in which there is no longer a tenable idea of the sacred." (Brooks, quoted in Ang, 1985: 80). *Dallas*, Ang argues, is not about the heroic and tragic events prominent in official histories. Rather, it is about "what is usually not acknowledged as tragic at all and for that very reason is so difficult to communicate. There are no words for the ordinary pain of living of ordinary people in modern welfare state, for the vague sense of loss...By making that ordinariness something special and meaningful in the imagination, that sense of loss can - at least for a time - be removed. It is in this world of the imagination that watching melodramatic soap operas like *Dallas* can be made pleasurable" (Ang, 1985: 80).

## 2. Questioning a model

### (i) *Criticisms of soap opera's textual analysis*

All of the analyses of soap opera which I have considered above have advanced our understanding of the genre, its characteristic form, and the ways with which it is engaged by viewers. Each writer has tried to articulate what he/she believes is special to soap opera, and in some cases particular programmes. With the exception perhaps of Gillian Swanson, each study seeks to show that soap's form does not function solely in the interest of dominant ideas, and that viewers engage with the genre in multiple and complicated

ways. Such accord indicates that the various studies have responded to other and preceding theories of popular culture and consumption.

The most obvious influence on all of the analyses is structuralism and the variant of it which in media and cultural studies has come to be known as Screen theory. (6). Crudely, the Screen theorists whose ideas reached the height of their authority in film studies in the 1970s are anti-realist: they believe that fictional texts adhere to realist conventions and that these conventions are illusory structures which the critic must penetrate in order to reveal the text's true meaning. Though, as I have indicated, Paterson and Stewart and especially Swanson are most clearly and directly influenced by Screen theory - in particular the notion that a text's coherent, mythical meaning lies deep within it - its impact is significant for some of the other studies I have considered. For instance, if Gillian Swanson penetrates *Dallas*' illusory realist structures in order to reveal its true, ideological meaning, Ien Ang does the same in order to show its more authentic emotional or melodramatic meanings.

Indeed, while Ien Ang's study might be considered post-structuralist in that it takes a special interest in real viewers' relation to *Dallas*, it is arguably as much influenced by film theory as the work of Gillian Swanson. It owes a great deal to the 'cracks and fissures' approach of the journal *Cahiers du Cinema* which, as I noted earlier, Terry Lovell argues is of limited use for analyses of soap opera. In close relation, it also draws directly on the work of Screen theorists who argued for the Brechtian possibilities of 1950s Hollywood melodrama: "(T)he audience's ideology is unmasked and is made to rebound back

upon itself." (Willeman, 1972/3: 132). And, as Jim McGuigan has indicated, Ang's theory of tragic realism is not so distant from Jacques Lacan's notion of the tension between imaginary unity and symbolic difference, influential to a number of 1970s Screen theorists (McGuigan, 1992: 147, and see Lacan, 1968).

"(T)he oppositional valences of popular culture are not treasure buried in the depth of the text...They are very much more on the surface of the text, part of the staple pleasures which popular culture affords its audience." (Lovell, 1981: 52).

Ien Ang follows Lovell's advice when she tries to identify the structure of feeling special to *Dallas* and its female viewers. However, when she argues that *Dallas*' affective, melodramatic moments speak what its realist narratives cannot, her theory of melodrama is at odds with Lovell's argument, particularly regarding the structure of contemporary soap opera and the task of the critic. Lovell, as I argued earlier, wants to help especially feminist analysts of soap opera escape the limits of structuralism. Ang's study of *Dallas* shares this aspiration, but still seems, to an extent, dependent on structuralist theories. It is at times torn between the imperatives of structuralism, post-structuralism and feminism. As such, *Watching Dallas* is a contradictory as well as valuable study. This is one reason why it demands a more detailed critique than some of the analyses I have considered, and I will undertake this shortly.

Lovell's concern to find a new method by which to analyse soap opera and popular culture is shared by others. In the



late-1970s, Laura Mulvey questioned the usefulness of theories of Brechtian distancing for an analysis of 1950s, especially Sirkian film melodrama:

"This (Brechtian) argument depends on the premise that the project of this (bourgeois) ideology is to conjure up a coherent picture of a world by concealing the incoherence caused by exploitation and oppression. In this view a text which defies unity and closure is quite clearly progressive. Although this line of argument has been productive and revealing, there is a way in which it has been trapped in a kind of Chinese box quite characteristic of melodrama itself. Ideological contradiction is the overt mainspring and specific content of melodrama, not a hidden, unconscious thread to be picked up only by special critical processes." (Mulvey, 1987 (1977/8): 75). (7).

In her review of the BFI's *Coronation Street* monograph - which contains the essays by Lovell and Paterson and Stewart to which I refer above - Caroline Merz makes very similar points regarding the various ways in which the *Granada* soap opera is analysed. With reference to Paterson and Stewart's identification of foundational Levi-Straussian oppositions in *Coronation Street*, Merz argues that "(w)hilst these are undoubtedly crucial conflicts for the series, they are in no sense 'concealed structures' but are foregrounded in every programme." (Merz, 1981: 106). Merz also notes that in her analysis of *Coronation Street*'s realism, Marion Jordan - by employing what Merz calls a conventionalist method, and which above I have termed anti-realism - argues that wit undermines or foregrounds the text's realist conventions (comedy here replacing Ang's tragedy). 'Foregrounding' itself is not necessarily progressive, argues Merz:

"In fact, such devices are widely understood and enjoyed (indeed they are crucial to the enjoyment of *Coronation Street*...)... (W)hat perhaps could more usefully have been discussed is how *Coronation Street* can get away with these

devices *because of itself* rather than *despite itself*: in other words, it may be that far from *Coronation Street* defying some of the devices of Soap Opera Realism as defined, the programme is itself the foundation on which the genre is based." (ibid.).

Merz argues that the *Coronation Street* monograph should be seen as a welcome introduction to the serious and scholarly analysis of soap opera. It represents the search for appropriate theoretical models by which to analyse the genre. As such, the essays the monograph contains sit uneasily together and often contradict each other. This will only present a problem, says Merz, if the monograph is taken to be the conclusive, unifying, academic word on soap opera. The analyses I have considered above indicate that Merz's fears have not been realized. They also, though, show both that soap opera still presents considerable demands for analysts of the genre, and that the danger of fixing too quickly critical norms and conceptions of soap opera remains.

More than any of the analyses I have considered, those of Tania Modleski and Ien Ang attempt to elaborate a theoretical model for the study of soap opera - that is, one which tries to locate the genre - its structures and engagements - historically and politically. Both analyses are driven similarly by feminist imperatives; and both arrive at a very similar model which is gender-politically radical, but theoretically familiar - and by the terms of Lovell, Mulvey and Merz, not only familiar but unproductive. I want to elaborate now on the criticisms I have begun to make of Ang's study. As I have noted, this is because it is

one of the most sustained and suggestive. It is also in the hope of finding pointers for my own analysis of *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*.

As I indicated earlier, Ang notes that she does not have the space in her study to consider the cultural and historical genesis of *Dallas*' melodramatic imagination/tragic structure of feeling (Ang, 1985: 66). Later she decides that she can give it some, brief consideration, and again draws upon the work of Peter Brooks (1976) to do so (Ang, 1985: 80). Brooks' ideas have had a major impact on the analysis of film melodrama as well as soap opera. Steve Neale's theory of (film) melodramatic engagement is very close to that of Ang. He follows Brooks to argue that melodrama's narrative structure combines with style to affect a tragic structure of feeling: "The cry and gesture... 'mark(s) its (the text's, the character's) inadequacies to convey a full freight of emotional meaning'." (Neale, 1986: 19). Similarly, in her analysis of soap opera aesthetics, Christine Geraghty argues that television soap operas exhibit an excess of meaning, gaps that must be filled in by viewers. The intensity of heightened, melodramatic moments "is more than the events of a particular episode warrant. They have to be filled in by the audience, those blank faces given a reason through the viewer's knowledge of the programme's past and a recreation of the feelings which the character must therefore be experiencing. It is this identification with heightened emotion through the filling of the space created by the excessive expressiveness of the *mise en scene* and performance which is the most important element in TV soap opera's melodramatic aesthetic." (Geraghty, 1991: 31). (8).



Soap opera, then - *Dallas* and *EastEnders*, for Ang and for Geraghty, in 1980s and 1990s criticism - is melodramatically and tragically real. We should take into account here, I think, not only Merz (1981) et al's arguments regarding the limits of conventional, anti-realist methods for soap analysis (above), but also the context and rationale of Brooks' influential study. *The Melodramatic Imagination* (Brooks, 1976) examines nineteenth century novels and stage melodrama. Like Willeman and other Screen theorists' analysis of the film melodramas of Douglas Sirk, Brooks' study is generally and sometimes unabashedly auterist in intent. The inspired methods of particular authors/directors reveal the contemporary social and human condition. Melodrama becomes a progressive, even radical form. Post-sacred society, argues Brooks, is preoccupied with the need to purge evil, to search for and define a new moral order. Melodrama works to bring the play of opposing forces to the fore:

"The world (of melodrama) is subsumed by an underlying manichaeism, and the narrative creates the excitement of its drama by putting us in touch with the conflict of good and evil played out under the surface of things" (Brooks, 1976: 4).

Refusing nuance, melodrama insists on pure, integral concepts (ibid., p.40). Predominantly, argues Brooks, it is melodrama's characters which embody opposing moral forces, playing them out in a heightened fashion and assuring the triumph of virtue (p.32). Villainy "constitutes the active force and the motor of the plot." (Brooks, 1976: 34).

Brooks' ideas, however much I have reduced them, present themselves here as a highly conventional interpretation of melodrama. They seem far removed from Ang and others' feminist project, and from contemporary soap opera. Crudely but not altogether inaccurately, I think, we might suggest that at one level Ang has used a familiar mode of criticism to replace the auteur and virtue with the ideal reader and the tragic feminine condition. Just as soap opera's - or melodrama's - moral tensions are, as I have argued, not deep structures to be unearthed by the author/critic/ideal reader, neither is the genre's meaning based on the interplay of pure, integral concepts. Jane Feuer has argued of *Dallas* that,

"(a)ny ultimate resolution - for good or for ill - goes against the only moral imperative of the continuing serial form: the plot must go on...Thus the fate of various couples depends not upon any fixed and eternal character traits, e.g. good/evil, happy/sad, but rather upon a curious fulcrum principle in relationship to other couples in the current plotline." (Feuer, 1984: 12-13).

Feuer is wrong, I think, to downplay the importance of soap operas' specific and changing moral imperatives. She introduces us, though, to a more useful way of thinking about soaps' structures than Ang. Soap operas like *Dallas* and especially *Home and Away* and *Neighbours*, I will argue, do not refuse nuance but explicitly depend on it. They depend on the nuances of romance and marriage, as Feuer suggests; on the nuances of gender, which threatens to become an integral concept in the analysis of Ang; and, as I indicated earlier, as Charlotte Brunsdon suggests, on the intricacies of personal conduct (Brunsdon, 1981: 35).

Ang and Brooks both emphasise how it is that melodrama's characters are able to express higher truths. Ang's theory apparently owes more to structuralism than that of Brooks in this respect. She follows Thomas Elsaesser to argue that "melodrama operates on a 'non-psychological conception of the *dramatis personae*, who figure less as autonomous individuals than to transmit the action and link the various locales within the total constellation..." (Ang, 1985: 64, quoting here Elsaesser, 1977). Thus the 'psychological credibility' of *Dallas*' characters, Ang argues, is subordinated to their structural function (ibid.). However, Ang's hold on this anti-realist theory at this stage in her analysis seems precarious. Her argument for *Dallas*' emotional/feminine realism frequently is close to a humanist notion of experiential and psychological realism; it privileges precisely the psychological credibility of key, female *Dallas* characters; and affirms not so much metaphoric recognition as character identification: "(T)he depiction of alcoholism should enable viewers to have some idea of Sue Ellen's psychological state, of her suffering, of the emotional conflicts she is battling with." (Ang, 1985: 65). (9).

Ang's commitment to an anti-realist mode of textual analysis and to a particular notion of feminine recognition seem at odds here. In this context it is noteworthy that one critic indicates his preference for *Dynasty* over *Dallas* because of the former's more fragmented, contradictory structure. *Dallas*, he argues in marked contrast to Ang, has a "stronger narrative thrust...and more butch storyline" (Fenwick, quoted in Finch, 1986: 27). I also noted earlier that Marion Jordan (1981) applies anti-realism to uncover aberrant wit in *Coronation Street*. And, at another point in her study, Christine Geraghty applies the same broad method to soap



opera to reveal on this occasion utopian rather than melodramatic realism (Geraghty, 1991: 123 - I refer to Geraghty's argument for soaps' melodramatic/emotional realism above). Again, like Ang and like her argument for melodramatic realism, most important to Geraghty here is how this sense of utopia is connected to a particular notion of the feminine condition and to key, mother/wife soap opera characters. Both critics' argument that soap opera's characteristic form offers multiple points of identification or engagement, threatens here to be obscured by the suggestion that specific, ideal viewers are able to identify with particular characters.

I do not want to question the value of Ang's study by overly dwelling on it. *Watching Dallas* identifies important parts of the special relationship between soap operas and large sections of their viewers. I am not sure, though, how useful or necessary Ang's chosen mode of textual analysis is in revealing or theorizing this relationship. As I have argued, it is a method which mixes conventional ideas about expressive realism and structuralist anti-realism in a sometimes contradictory fashion. More importantly, I want to argue that it is also a model of soap opera analysis which threatens to make timeless particular notions of genre and gender. Here, Ang's study joins with others in the establishment of a relative orthodoxy. While Ang's theory of transcendent melodramatic moments depends on the idea of a coherent ideological system (see Mulvey, 1987, and my reference to her argument, above), it also privileges the notion that soap is more open and objective than other genres - for characters and "floating viewers", the world of soap is "totally ambiguous" (Ang, 1985: 76). To varying degrees, this notion of progressive openness, I would argue, informs all of the analyses of soap opera I have considered

above (with the exception, again, of Swanson's study). Like Jane Feuer, I want to argue that while soap opera and melodrama do offer their viewers a highly active role, this does not mean that they should be considered especially open or liberating: "The 'openness' of TV texts does not in and of itself represent a salutary or progressive stance." (Feuer, 1984: 15).

There is a danger, I think, that in the shadow of structuralism, Screen theory and elitist conceptions of soap opera, it is enough that critics are able to argue that soap opera and melodrama are open, their readers productive and skilled. This danger may be especially acute when analyses are shorn of their feminist project. As I argued earlier, Robert Allen's reader-oriented poetics is undoubtedly an accurate description of the invitations made by soap opera, but in terms of critical analysis it should only be thought of as a starting point. Without an historical and theoretical engagement with a particular text, the reader-oriented method remains rooted in phenomenology and threatens to be every bit as internalizing as the structuralist method it seeks to replace. In fairness, in *Speaking of Soap Operas* Allen does provide a valuable historicisation of the reception of the genre (Allen, 1985: chapter 6). Again, though, this represents a broad introduction to the genre's place in culture and is critically autonomous to his textual - but still generic - analysis. There is a need, I think, to combine an analysis of the ways with which a particular soap opera is engaged with a critical historical and theoretical study of this specific engagement. As I suggested earlier, and as I will argue is the case regarding *Home and Away* and *Neighbours*,

this is especially urgent when Allen's model of narrative complexity can only be applied to a very limited degree to a particular programme.

That, as I will argue, it is difficult to apply Allen's reader-oriented model of analysis to *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* is partly because they are different in various ways to the concept of soap opera he mobilizes. *EastEnders'* form, for example, owes more to the realist novel than that of *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*, and this is one of the reasons why David Buckingham chooses - and to some extent is justified in choosing - a literary mode of study. *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*, though, are not only different, but, I will argue, have changed. Textual studies of soap opera, clearly, must not only be sensitive to what may be special to particular texts, but must respond to cultural change. As I have indicated, a number, probably most of the studies I have considered emerge in a period of transition in cultural analysis. I have been most critical of *Watching Dallas* in this respect. One of the most detailed and circumspect textual studies, though (that of David Buckingham), also mixes an anti-realist critique with post-structuralist optimism regarding the knowingness of *EastEnders'* viewers: "(V)iewers...play a game with characters' lives and destinies...and...know that it is, in the end, just a game." (Buckingham, 1987: 69).

If *EastEnders'* viewers are becoming more skilful in their engagements with the text's characteristic and changing generic norms, then this tendency should not, perhaps, be dismissed as just a game. Neither can it be explained by structuralist theories which indicate that *EastEnders* in the final analysis functions to contain broader social contradictions. This, especially, is the suggestion of



Buckingham's analysis with regard to the way the programme reproduces feminine and familial patterns of behaviour. If, as Buckingham, argues, *EastEnders* now (then, mid-1980s) complicates masculine norms, then this not only needs to be met by new modes of criticism, but will, I am sure, be importantly related to the programme's treatment of feminine and familial norms and the ways with which these are responded to by viewers.

These, I will argue, are acute questions for *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*. As Buckingham's study begins to indicate, though, they are probably important questions for most soap operas today. That soap operas respond to, are part of changes in culture may be one reason why some of the key parts of Ien Ang's analysis of *Dallas* now seem far removed from *Home and Away* and *Neighbours*, and soap opera more generally. While Ang notes that dialogue is the narrative instrument of soap opera, she also argues that the spoken word is relativized in *Dallas*, and that soap operas "never contain any critical and conscious self reflection." (Ang, 1985: 73). And, as I have noted, central to her theory of contemporary, feminine tragedy is that in soap opera, in 'the modern welfare state' "(t)here are no words for the ordinary pain of living of ordinary people" (ibid., p.80). Not only, I will suggest, is conscious self-reflection central to the narrative structures and cultural projects of *Home and Away* and *Neighbours*, but they, large parts of popular culture, and the modern welfare state arguably play a major part in the production and reproduction of words for the ordinary pain of living of ordinary people.

That Ang's theories are questionable may be to do both with changes in soap opera and culture and with the limits of her model of analysis. As I have indicated, Ang's analysis is at

stages contradictory. In the concluding parts of her theory of *Dallas*' melodramatic imagination, Ang makes suggestions which though at odds with the ideas to which I have just made reference also begin to indicate how to move beyond them. *Dallas*' pleasures and engagements, says Ang, are not determined solely by its structure. Further, the text may connect with various types of imagination, alternating with the melodramatic and tragic one she identifies (Ang, 1985: 82). Ang at this point moves well beyond structuralism, instituting, I think, a questionable distance between (bad) academic theory and (good) spontaneous, heterogeneous reading pleasures. She usefully introduces, though, the notion of viewing as a cultural practice. *Dallas*' characteristic form, she argues, is only one important feature of what is the broader practice of its consumption. Further, the particular pleasures that *Dallas* offers its viewers should not be thought of as compensation for or flight from life and its trials; they are, rather, a dimension of these (ibid., p.83).

(ii) *Reassessing soap opera and melodrama*

In making these suggestions, Ang anticipates the attempts by critics in the 1980s and 90s to move beyond the limits of structuralist analysis. Various scholars have sought to produce models of analysis which avoid the limits of structuralist determinism without becoming too sanguine regarding the plural nature of reading activity; and as I suggested earlier, Lovell (1981) and Brunsdon (1981) anticipate such moves more fully than Ang. In a number of essays, Jane Feuer has also argued that established models of textual analysis have been applied too readily to soap opera and melodrama. Feuer questions the wide application

and usefulness of both literary-hermeneutic analysis for film and television (Feuer, 1986: 102), and progressive 1950s (Sirkian-Brechtian) film melodrama analysis for contemporary television soap opera (Feuer, 1984: 8). One of the reasons that particular textual or generic strategies can no longer be thought of as radical, argues Feuer, is how familiar and normative they are for contemporary television and its viewers (Feuer, 1989: 449). The recovery of meaning in popular television programmes, Feuer argues, is not as straightforward as structuralist analyses suggest. Programmes like *Dynasty*, she says, make multiple invitations. Identifying single preferred or aberrant readings becomes a difficult if not suspect task. For example, if a nasty character or tragic moment is greeted with hisses rather than gasps, laughter rather than tears, then these should be recognised as some of a number of the text's preferred responses rather than as aberrant readings (ibid., p.447). Connecting with Ang's notion of practice, Feuer argues that texts should be thought of as facilitators - neither infinitely open nor singularly structured in dominance, but able to activate a number of responses. These responses, argues Feuer, have been learned and refined variously. Rather than thinking in terms of texts and readers, we should instead conceive of both as reading formations (p.458 - Feuer, drawing here, in particular, on Bennett, 1983).

This argument is close to one made by Annette Kuhn, who argues that the study of 'feminine genres' might benefit from an engagement with theories of discourse (Kuhn, 1984: 27). Both implied textual subjects and social audiences may then be theorised as discursive constructs:



"Representations, contexts, audiences and spectators would then be seen as a series of interconnected social discourses, certain discourses possessing greater constitutive authority at specific moments than others. Such a model permits relative autonomy for the operations of texts, readings and contexts, and also allows for contradictions, oppositional readings and varying degrees of discursive authority." (ibid.).

This notion of interconnected and competing discourses is elaborated upon by Christine Gledhill in her theory of cultural negotiation. Focusing on female pleasures, and especially the film *Coma* (1977), Gledhill suggests that a critical notion of negotiation may help us move beyond the limits of structuralism to bridge the gap between the textual and social subject (Gledhill, 1988: 67). A model of negotiation based on Gramsci's theory of hegemony will help to explain the "overlapping but non-matching determinations" and practices of texts, audiences and institutions (ibid., p.68). Like Feuer, Gledhill is critical of analyses which privilege the notion of single, most important positions of textual engagement (p.73). Like Feuer, too, Gledhill takes a sustained interest in melodrama and soap opera, and in how we might most usefully theorize, and adapt our ideas to, their changing forms and audiences.

In an earlier essay, Gledhill provides a valuable historicisation of melodrama which indicates why it is, or should be considered to be, difficult to fix the form generically. Melodrama, Gledhill argues, has characteristically mixed cultural and aesthetic forms. Early nineteenth century theatre in England - 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' - initiated audiences into a range of cultural forms, preparing the way for "aesthetic transmutation between genres and modes - for a welding of

fantasy, spectacle and realism - which would be crucial to the melodramatic aesthetic as a cross-class and cross-cultural form." (Gledhill, 1987: 18). Melodrama's excesses, Gledhill indicates, proved a poor relation to the hegemony narrative realism enjoyed from the end of the nineteenth century onwards. They also, though, proved highly attractive to Hollywood. Rather than being a saviour of the form, the cinema industry combined with other parts of consumer culture to extend and renew melodrama.

Melodrama's Hollywood context and twentieth century cultural denigration, argues Gledhill, have provided a basis for a number of its studies. This she says has led to two related tendencies: a perceived need to recuperate melodrama in the course of analyses; and a definition and understanding of melodrama as a 'women's form' as compared to 'masculine' realist forms - especially other types of Hollywood film. While understandable, this, Gledhill argues, has not been entirely productive. The categorisation of melodrama as a women's genre, she notes, is arguably a retrospective move (ibid., p.33). Femininity is not an inherent feature of melodrama. Scholars of the form should remember that it was first praised for its democratic, not feminine sensibility; and that psychological realism and high emotion were key sources of artistic and moral value in nineteenth century culture (p.34).

The contracted reach of the term melodrama continues to occupy Gledhill when in a later essay she speculates on the relationship between soap opera and melodrama (Gledhill, 1992). In soap opera analysis, she notes, there is considerable discrepancy regarding the extent to which, or how the genre may be thought of as melodramatic. The BFI's *Coronation Street* monograph (1981) suggests that soap opera

owes its form to British social realism. Robert Allen's *Speaking of Soap Opera* (1985) makes no reference to melodrama and argues that soap opera inherited Hollywood's classic-realist aesthetic. And while Tania Modleski (1982) argues that soap opera markedly diverges from film melodrama, Ien Ang's *Watching Dallas* (1985) theorises a close relation between soap and 1950s film melodrama (ibid., p.103). Clearly, argues Gledhill, analysts of soap opera and melodrama must take stock of their terms. Melodrama is able, imaginatively and aesthetically, to cut across genres. It also addresses and appeals to specific, not least female, sections of popular audiences. To retain the breadth of this interest and maintain the pursuit of what is special to melodrama requires an understanding of melodrama as a cultural "project" (Gledhill, 1992: 104). In this way we can begin to grasp how it is that melodrama is at once a cultural practice and an aesthetic theory, a relatively stable form and dynamic process (ibid.).

Gledhill reiterates and extends her criticism of recent analysts' tendency to conflate melodrama, soap opera and femininity. By theorising melodrama within the framework of domestic oppression, or by rescuing despised genres "we neither grasp what melodrama means in general, nor what goes on in the cultural sphere designated as 'woman's'." (p.106). Again Gledhill indicates that the gendering of melodrama is a twentieth century phenomenon. As various critics have argued, the nineteenth century generally, across culture was conceived of in what we now think of as melodramatic terms. (10). Melodrama, as well as producing specific aesthetic conventions, "also gave rise to an imaginative mode which informed not only artistic production across media, but intellectual, social, and political thought as well." (Gledhill, 1992: 106). This, indicates Gledhill, may seem at



odds with arguments privileging the nineteenth century's institutionalization of novelistic or classical realism. Gledhill argues, though, that this is not the paradox it may seem. Melodrama retained a special narrative and aesthetic organisation and peculiar verisimilitude; but as a primary way of conceiving the world, it depended, too, on dominant conventions of realism, as well as on contemporary realities and issues (ibid., p.107).

Gledhill argues that it is through personalisation that melodrama works to renew the secular moral order; and in this respect it shares the ideological impetus and individualism of the realist novel. However, where in the realist novel there is a characteristic movement outwards from individual to society, melodrama works in reverse, "understanding the social and political only as they touch on the moral identities and relationships of individuals." (p.108). In melodrama, how people feel and relate to each other is of the utmost consequence. This does not simply mean that the social and political are displaced by melodrama onto the personal and the familial in an effort to secure bourgeois fantasy resolution. Neither does it mean that melodrama should be thought of as 'family drama' *per se*. Rather, argues Gledhill, "melodrama uses familial relations in order to access the desires, ethical identities, and ideological conflicts which provide its rationale." (Gledhill, 1992: 108).

Gledhill argues that soap opera lent melodrama new forms of desire, identity and conflict, and in so doing continued the form's investment in relationships, the personal and the everyday. Perhaps most importantly, more fully and directly than previous melodramatic forms, soap opera from its inception took a special interest in the gendered nature of

personal desires and realities. Unlike earlier theatrical and film melodrama, soap opera was devised as a woman's form (ibid., p.109). Radio advertisers and soap opera producers targeted predominantly female domestic audiences, and looked to other successful 'women's media' for effective forms and narrative material. Under the broad heading of domestic fiction, magazines, novelettes, serial fiction, short stories, romances and advice columns all contributed in some way to early radio soap opera.

Usefully, Gledhill suggests that 'domestic realism' may be a category worthy of critical attention (p.111). She notes that by various critics the domestic novel has been credited with initiating a cultural tradition continued by soap opera and the woman's film (p.110). Turn of the century female novelists responded to and quite radically reworked the aesthetic and imaginative modes established by earlier melodramas. Retaining a focus on personal relationships, domestic novels worked through their complexities more transparently than preceding melodramas. An emphasis on dialogue was favoured over melodrama's fitful plotting and metaphoric codes of expression. Though connected, domestic novels in this sense met neither the aesthetic demands of melodrama nor more dominant modes of realism. They differed, too, in their cultural projects. The novels, Gledhill argues, played a major part in articulating a new domestic realism, a new way of imagining the domestic and the personal. Through dialogue they investigated new modes of interaction and subjectivity. It was of course primarily the 'female situation' and feminine modes of subjectivity upon which the novels focussed. As Gledhill indicates, though, in the heroine's search for herself, not only were melodrama's strategies reworked, but a realizable social programme was

constructed "in which the superior values of the domestic sphere...(were) extended to embrace society as a whole and bring about male reformation." (Gledhill, 1992: 111).

This process, Gledhill shows, was crucial in the genesis of soap opera. If at times domestic realism existed in an uneasy tension with Hollywood's affective and melodramatic demands, then radio and television soap opera provided it with more unequivocally fertile ground. Further, and supporting criticisms of Ien Ang's (1985) study I made earlier, to understand soap opera as part of the genesis of broad notions of domestic realism is to recognise the centrality of talk and self-reflection to the genre; to understand that it offers "an arena for learning, for bringing things out into the open, talking problems over and working them through." (Gledhill, 1992: 114). While sharing the narrative themes of spectacular melodrama, domestic novels and soap opera - by giving dialogue the primary dramatic role and drawing more directly from 'a set of highly articulate female discursive forms' - "exist precisely to work through the psychic and social contradictions which melodrama must externalize through non-verbal means." (ibid., p.115).

Clearly, television soap opera does not dispense with melodrama's aesthetic codes. Indeed, Gledhill's analysis shows that it is soap opera's peculiar ability to mix the codes of melodrama and realism which may lend it its cultural force (Gledhill, 1992: 118-119; in an earlier essay, Gledhill suggests that soap opera is not alone in this respect - Gledhill, 1988: 75). It may also be why the genre is so responsive to and reproductive of social tensions and change. Gledhill argues that in the post-war period soap opera more than most genres has negotiated



changing familial and gender norms (Gledhill, 1992: 118-119). In recent years especially, domestic realism's project is renewed by soap opera. In particular, the domestic novel's reformation of the male continues, but at the very least is given a new twist:

"As a women's form, soap opera pioneered...a space for representing...personal life...which, if devalued in the immediate post-war years of economic reconstruction, becomes an invaluable cultural resource in the late 70s when international economic and political crises throw the gender roles and patriarchal values underlying capitalist production into question. The question 'how to live'...becomes acute when warfare, law-enforcement, politics, multi-national business (the arenas of masculine endeavor and achievement) spell corruption, torture, terrorism, and annihilation, and the women's movement makes the cultural validation of machismo no longer an easy option. In the first instance we can observe the spread of soap opera structures into male preserves such as the crime series...and the entry in their own right of a widening range of male characters into soap operas. But for male characters to enact male dramas inside soap opera or for soap opera structures to operate inside a 'male' genre, a break is required with conventions of gender representation - which dictate taciturnity and invincibility as marks of masculinity and construe talk about personal feelings as 'feminizing'." (ibid., p.119).

## Conclusions

At this stage I will make some brief conclusions in order, only, to underline what I think are the important points raised in the course of this chapter. At the chapter's close I have focused on the recent work of Christine Gledhill. This is because I believe it to be instructive in various ways for my own study. Gledhill's analysis indicates the need for a critical history of popular cultural forms. This helps us to do at least three things: to avoid the pitfalls

of theoretical and genre orthodoxies; to address social and cultural change - as well as the enduring features of particular forms and their audiences; and to construct new, informed theoretical models of analysis. As I have indicated, Ang and Modleski do provide some cultural-historical context for their analyses. Their historical theorisation, though, is tentative and appears highly selective when compared with Gledhill's studies. Like Gledhill, Modleski shows that soap opera negotiates new domestic and everyday realities. This does not mean, though, that the genre is necessarily or inherently anti-realist or feminine. As Gledhill also indicates, soap opera in this respect is not avant-garde, but continues a process established by previous domestic and melodramatic forms. In this respect, too, if soap opera reproduces a melodramatic imagination, then it is a sensibility more complicated and historically and culturally pervasive than is suggested by Ien Ang's study.

Gledhill's analysis indicates that melodrama and soap opera reproduce fantasies beyond and sometimes at odds with those of feminine powerlessness. As a broadly modern form, melodrama participates in the institution of new modes of knowing, of subjectivity, and in a particular fantasy of democracy extending beyond the domestic sphere. In this context, Ang and Modleski's emphasis on and conception of soap's feminine community of interest not only, as Gledhill shows, reduces our understanding of soap opera and melodrama. For this study it presents some very specific problems. In the late-twentieth century gender relations remain unequal. Many women's ambitions, though, go beyond the desire to keep repairing a dysfunctional family. While they may still recognise and may be unfortunately or tragically attached to that structure of feeling, it now

competes with other sensibilities and fantasies. This, we will see, is plain when teenage women are interviewed. Crudely, too, where do men and my young male interviewees fit into Ang and Modleski's model of analysis? Reading Modleski's analysis in particular, as a male critic and viewer of soap opera it is easy to feel like one of her significant absences.

As I have argued, post-structuralist or not, Ang and Modleski's studies still seem dependent on familiar dichotomies and on a unified notion of patriarchy. They are not, as I have indicated, alone in this respect. Though in various ways structured in dominance, soap operas do not "whole-heartedly embrace" patriarchal myths and institutions (Modleski, 1982: 113). Gledhill's analysis, and that of others indicates not only that this has arguably never been the case, but that it constitutes a failure to recognize a central feature of soap opera and melodrama's projects - that is, the negotiation of consistent and changing gender norms and identities. If a feminine aesthetic as Modleski conceives of it has been lent its greatest cultural force by soap opera, then Gledhill and Feuer's studies show both that soap neither pioneered such a form and that it is now a pervasive not special part of popular culture. In however naive or limited a fashion, explicit reflection upon the tensions privileged in Ang and others' studies is the norm for many contemporary entertainments.

Crudely, and as Gledhill best illustrates in her 1988 essay, *Pleasurable Negotiations*, in popular texts and in cultural analysis investigations no longer - or should no longer - concern themselves with either/ors; their pursuit, rather, is both, ands. Contemporary melodrama may hold onto some parts of Manichaean moral frameworks, but must combine these



with a negotiation of those contemporary discourses - psychonanalysis, marriage guidance, medical ethics, politics, feminism - "which will ground the drama in a recognizable verisimilitude." (Gledhill, 1988: 76). In popular melodrama, Gledhill argues, we witness "atavistic and Utopian desires; archetypal and futuristic motifs; sensibility and reason; melodrama and realism." (ibid., p.87). The film *Coma* (1977), Gledhill argues, combines typical ideas about femininity with what are now equally recognizable modes of female independence (p.78). The same, I would argue, is not only true of soap opera and large parts of popular culture, but of other - familial, parenting, romance, work, leisure - related cultural practices and assumptions. As Gledhill indicates in her later essay, in recent years and increasingly, soap opera is a site for the examination of not only women's but men's culture, and frequently contests concepts of both (Gledhill, 1992: 122).

By emphasising the negotiative nature of popular cultural forms we risk sliding toward unproductive optimism and cultural relativity. As I have argued, there is nothing inherently liberating about negotiative and apparently fragmented structures; but neither do they leave us with a picture of total ambiguity, as the analysis of Ang (1985: 76) and some other post-structural theorists might suggest. In this context, Lovell (1981) and Gledhill's (1988) retention and application of Gramscian theories of hegemony to contemporary melodramas is welcome and productive. So too is Annette Kuhn's (1984) suggestion that soap analysts might usefully engage with theories of discourse. This leads us toward the work of Michel Foucault. Foucault's ideas have

informed a number of studies of popular culture in recent years. For instance, their influence is evident in Gledhill's notion of cultural negotiation:

"By studying the history and forms of aesthetic practices, codes and traditions as they operate within institutions, by studying narrative forms and genres, or the interpretive frameworks and viewing habits suggested by ethnographic research, the textual critic analyses the conditions and possibilities of reading." (Gledhill, 1988: 74).

Gledhill here, like Kuhn, takes us away from theories of deep structures toward the notion of a matrix of power and authority. How is it, how has it come about that discourses combine to make some meanings most persuasive, some practices more 'normal'? Starting points are not singular and essential but various and manifest. Soap operas and other popular entertainments are not expressive of a totality to be located elsewhere. They are, rather, "one of a series of interconnected...discourses" (Kuhn, 1984: 27) which in their surfaces and fragments elaborate and simultaneously are constitutive of particular social and historical relations. By this model of analysis, the dilemma posed by reader-oriented critics like Robert Allen (1987) - how determinate is a text's structure of meaning? - if it does not become redundant is at least revealed as naive. Texts and readers' interpretations of them are understood as related and competing cultural practices. Both appeal to and make claims for discursive authority. In this respect, the knowingness and reflective strategies of texts and viewers are precisely such claims. If they now come easily to viewers and are conventional parts of texts, then they should be investigated as contemporary competencies and subjectivities. To do so will entail going beyond some of the established notions of soap opera, and of gendered

sensibilities, identities and practices. It will entail the broad and specific, the historical and theoretical location of domestic realism - which following Christine Gledhill we should conceive of as a stable and dynamic arena for learning.

## Footnotes

1. A note on genre and realism: This chapter seeks to show why a move beyond Ian Ang and others' concepts of soap opera and melodrama is necessary for an analysis of *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*. This is both because of what is special to the two programmes, and because it is believed that particular concepts of soap opera and melodrama are in need of revision (not rejection). In the final sections of chapter 1, I indicate how Gledhill, in particular, leads us toward a broader and more useful concept of melodrama. It is a concept which I think is not only more historically informed than others, but also shows why all soap operas, to greater or lesser degrees, continue melodrama's cultural project. *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* are clearly melodrama in the terms employed by Gledhill (1987, 1992). My argument is that if we were to apply only the concepts of melodrama used by Ang (and Brooks who she follows) to *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*, then neither programme would qualify as melodrama. This, as Gledhill's work indicates (along with that of Colin Mercer, whose studies I consider in chapter 6), would be a considerable historical oversight.

In chapter 2, I will illustrate that in terms of their narrative structure *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* are unquestionably soap operas - by all genre theorists' terms, and following Steve Neale's argument that in some cases narrative structure is the best measure of genre (Neale, 1990: 62). However, as I show, more directly *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* take their narrative form from the romance strip - or, more accurately, what has become the combination of the romance strip and problem page. In this respect it could be argued that the two programmes represent a sub-genre of soap opera as it is understood in its dominant generic form (ibid., p.66). However, I would argue that locating such a dominant form of soap opera in Britain in the 1990s is at best difficult. In everyday usage, concepts of soap opera tend to combine residual ideas about soap



opera and television that are not specifically British with similar and different ideas about specifically UK soaps. This is evident in my interviewees' responses, as I indicate in chapter 5. In media and cultural studies, I would argue - and do so here, in chapter 1 - that Ang's model of soap opera has come to dominate understandings, and has, by extension, combined unproductively quite different soap operas (see, for example, my criticism of Marie Gillespie's understanding of *Neighbours*' form - which is close to Ang's model and markedly different to my analysis of *Neighbours* - in chapter 5).

If *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* are sub-generic, then it is a sub-genre that gives new life to the first broadcast soap operas' inheritance of domestically-oriented self-help from a variety of popular literature. We could think of this as the 'meaning load' or sub-generic weighting that distinguishes *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* from other soap operas on British terrestrial television. As I indicate in chapter 2, what makes the two Australian soap different from early American radio and television soap operas is that advice and expertise in self-management is normalized as an everyday practice for all characters - the modern self combining with and, as I argue, overtaking family, mothering and parenting as an ideal.

However, *Home and Away* and *Neighbours*' cultural and generic inheritance is considerably greater than 1930s soap operas and 1980s problem pages. As I indicate in chapter 6, more than any soap operas the two programmes owe a debt to pre-novel literature. Like all soap operas, though, *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* take from melodrama and the novel in the way that Mercer theorizes these (Mercer, 1986, 1988). The thesis moves via Mercer and others to *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* as cultural technologies. This is not to reject theories of soap opera as a genre. In chapter 2, the descriptive and the theoretical movement is from soap opera, to what is special to the two programmes (what here I am calling their sub-generic status), to a broadening out to consider what Steve Neale would describe as *Home and Away* and *Neighbours*' intertextual generic regime (Neale, 1990: 58) - which, crucially, further investigates what is special to these two programmes.

This is, to a degree, as I note, a question of aesthetic and stylistic hybridity; but is more importantly about the cultural project that *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* share with other generic texts (including, as I argue in chapters 6 and 7, some television and cinema, as well as problem pages and advice literature). This regime is finite in intertextual and generic terms. It must, though, as Neale indicates, be connected with changing social and cultural

realities (Neale, 1990: 59); and this is what I attempt to do progressively in the thesis, but especially in the last two chapters.

On realism: Chapter 5 is more fully concerned with realism than chapters 1 and 2. There it is made clear how respondents engage both with the programmes' generic realism (what Neale calls generic verisimilitude - *ibid.*, p.47) and with an understanding of cultural or referential realism (Neale's cultural verisimilitude - p.47). Precisely as Neale indicates (drawing on Todorov), and as I argue in chapter 5, very often this engagement is best understood not as a movement between the programmes' discourse and its referent, but "between discourse and what readers believe is true" (Neale, 1990: 47). As Neale argues, this tendency speeds up and the distinction between generic and cultural verisimilitude lessens as our culture becomes more mediated (*ibid.*, p.48).

In terms of their textuality, *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* do, like all soaps and most television and cinema fiction texts, depend on the realist strategies established by Hollywood. They also, as I indicate in chapter 2, enjoy violating these conventions. That is, frequently they wear their comic strip inheritance on their sleeve. This is one reason, as I indicate in chapter 5, why my interviewees lampooned them. In so doing, as I show, respondents simultaneously affirmed dominant modes of realism - including Hollywood's use of continuity editing and naturalistic settings; but also broader dominant modes such as rounded and developed characterization.

The problem I have with Ang's use of melodramatic realism is, I think, made clear at the close of chapter 1. That is, for Ang, melodramatic realism (which she uses interchangeably with emotional realism, thus denying, I would argue, melodrama's ethnographic imperative, made clear by Gledhill, but especially Mercer) is a transcendent form of realism. It is the emotional realism which breaks free - 'speaks directly' - of *Dallas*' narrative realism. In this respect, as I argue in chapter 1, Ang's thesis is anti-realist in the same way that Screen theory is (my use of anti-realism here being highly specific - see, as I note below, Lapsley and Westlake, 1988 for a summary of this debate, and, for example, John Corner's use of the same term - Corner, 1992: 100). In privileging emotional realism, Ang remains dependent on classical narrative realism - as it has been defined by, for example, McCabe (1974) - as her significant other; the other from which emotional realism can break free. Regardless of her motivations, Ang's model suggests that *Dallas* is an ideological whole which, because of the nature of their experiences, women viewers,



especially, are able to penetrate. In the latter stages of this chapter I indicate that this model is no longer tenable both because of its methodological flaws, and because of changes in society and culture.

In terms of predominant methods in media and cultural studies, Ang, as I note, seems caught between structuralism and poststructuralism. That is, on the one hand she depends both on the concept of a unified, ideological text and on characters functioning only for a dominant narrative structure; on the other, she suggests that characters' (and viewers') positions are fundamentally ambiguous, and that her respondents' readings result from their specific social and cultural location. My study is not structuralist. It moves on from structuralism, but hesitates to call itself poststructuralist for the reasons I detail in the latter section of chapter 3.

Finally on realism, my thesis does not reject the importance of identifying historical modes of realism; but neither does it want to argue that *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* represent or privilege a particular type of realism - classical, emotional or any other. As I indicate in chapter 2, and then throughout the thesis, what the two programmes privilege is a particular type of self and ethical scenario; an authentic self and 'right' behaviour. This, as I show in chapter 5, is what my interviewees frequently use to measure realism; and crucially, this assessment is used in combination with - not in distinction to - empirical and generic measurements. The programmes, then, have to be understood not only as soap opera, but as key parts or mechanisms - technologies - in a historical process of normalization. The theorists of realism who best help me to make this formulation are Donald and Mercer (1981) and Williams (1977a), whose ideas are drawn upon in chapter 5.

2. Viewers, here, is my choice. Symptomatically, we may say, Swanson uses the term spectators.

3. I am not suggesting that Lovell leads theory in this respect. The notion of particular sensibilities or structures of feeling informs the work, in no particular order, of various critics during this period - for example, Modleski, 1979; Brunsdon, 1981; Dyer 1973 and 1981.

4. Modleski of course does not suggest that such practices are natural to femininity. She does, though, affirm a particular notion of femininity more fully than Brunsdon - who leaves an important door open here. That is, because the arrangements under which women are likely to possess such attributes are "present", they are historically changeable - and, I would argue, to some extent at least have changed.



5. This said, the two theorists' notion of melodrama and its relation to soap opera is notably different. Modleski argues that soap opera diverges from traditional melodrama (Modleski, 1982: 107). Unlike fitful, contradictory soap opera, she says, melodrama's excesses succeed in - the genre is premised on - overcoming inhibition and repression. Also worthy of note is that to support this argument Modleski draws on one of Ang's primary theoretical influences - Peter Brooks' *The Melodramatic Imagination* (1976). Clearly, Modleski's use and understanding of Brooks' work is considerably different from that of Ang.

6. The best summary of Screen theory is provided by Lapsley and Westlake (1988) - who also provide a good critique of Screen's version of anti-realism in chapters 6 and 7 of the same volume. For a more gender-oriented critique, see the introduction to Gamman and Marshment (1988).

7. Ang does in fact make reference to the essay from which this quote comes (Ang, 1985: 73), but rather selectively it would seem.

8. Without wanting to devalue Christine Geraghty's valuable study, this passage, as part of a 1991 publication, does tend to signal the full institutionalization of a particular model for the analysis of soap opera. Geraghty combines here ideas about melodrama, realism, identification, femininity, democracy/openness, complex narratives (the excessive elements and narrative gaps are important, Geraghty argues, because of the complicated nature of the stories being told - Geraghty, 1991: 30), and ideal and productive readers.

9. If this is a problem, then the cover of the paperback edition of *Watching Dallas* (Sue Ellen's torn face) is a symptom of it. Despite her argument that soap opera offers multiple points of identification, Ang does come perilously close to a straightforward identification with key female characters here and at other points in her study. She is not alone in this respect. Modleski, Ang and others' theories are as much, and perhaps more accurately, about recognition as identification. Briefly, like Martin Barker I believe concepts of identification to be under-theorized and of no great use to media and cultural studies in any case. As Barker indicates, when not brought to the aid of celebratory or heroic accounts of media consumption, notions of identification more often provide a point of focus for familiar anxieties (Barker, 1989: 92-116).

10. Gledhill draws on Brooks (1976) here; and with reference to footnote 4, above, her use of his ideas is noteworthy - and, I would argue, more helpful than that of Ang.

## Chapter 2: A Textual Analysis of *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*

This chapter is a close textual analysis of *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*. I look at six episodes - three from each programme - in detail, but also draw on my general knowledge of the two programmes. (I have watched both, occasionally, since their first UK transmissions. My regular viewing of *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* began with the study in October 1991, and continues - if somewhat less religiously.) The chapter continues from the previous one inasmuch as the texts are understood from the outset as cultural sites where a number of historical and contemporary discourses combine. The textual analysis, however, is as much the development as the extension of an argument. It was hoped that through an initial breakdown of the narrative form and content of the programmes a better understanding of their cultural projects would be reached; and that another part could be added to the historical and theoretical framework which supports the thesis.

Through an analysis of narrative, genre, characters and setting, two main arguments are developed. Firstly, that we must go beyond conventional conceptions of soap opera to understand *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*'s form. And secondly, that the primary project of the programmes is to invite characters and viewers to know and transform themselves.

In the latter parts of the chapter, specific examples of the programmes' narrative invitations are examined in detail. It is argued that the programmes should be understood as facilitators or exercises in knowledge and expertise. This

anticipates the Foucauldian theories of self-government which are introduced in the following chapter and elaborated upon in chapter 6. The chapter closes with some recent historical examples of popular culture which make similar invitations to their readers as those which it is argued are made to viewers of *Home and Away* and *Neighbours*. This anticipates the more extensive historicisation given to the two programmes' form in chapter 6, as well as some contemporary examples of popular forms of self-government which are discussed in chapter 7.

I have selected three episodes of each of the two soap operas to be analysed in detail. Each of these six episodes was viewed with one or other of my individual interviewees. As in the interviews, at stages the programmes, their characteristic features and historical narratives, will be referred to more generally. The six episodes in question featured twenty narratives in total, one of them having five instead of the characteristic three stories. I will call the episodes Episode 1, 2 or 3 of *Neighbours* and Episode 1, 2 or 3 of *Home and Away*. They were broadcast as follows: Of *Neighbours*, Episode 1: 10.5.93; Episode 2: 10.2.94; Episode 3: 3.10.94; of *Home and Away*, Episode 1: 1.6.93; Episode 2: 30.9.93; Episode 3: 3.10.94.

Here are the titles I will give the narratives, and their ostensible themes:

#### Episode 1, *Neighbours*

Narrative 1: *Brad and Lucy* - romantic negotiation  
2: *Lou and Madge* - romantic negotiation  
3: *Jim and Jill* - romantic negotiation (goes to psycho-thriller)

#### Episode 2, *Neighbours*



Narrative 1: Philip and Julie - husband and wife/parenting negotiation  
2: Gaby and Wayne - romantic negotiation  
3: Cameron and comedy - fun/rogue narrative  
4: Phoebe and Russell - psycho-thriller  
5: Lauren and Chuckie - aspiring entrepreneur

### Episode 3, Neighbours

Narrative 1: Jack and Gaby - romantic negotiation  
2: Brad and Beth - romantic negotiation  
3: Julie and Michael - stepmother and son/parenting negotiation

### Episode 1, Home and Away

Narrative 1: Les and Blake - father and son negotiation  
2: Bobby and Donald - hospital drama  
3: Sophie and work - single mother trials

### Episode 2, Home and Away

Narrative 1: Sally and Damien - growing pains  
2: Fin and exam stress - growing pains  
3: Shane and Nick - sibling/parenting negotiation

### Episode 3, Home and Away

Narrative 1: Tug and Beth - illicit love  
2: Shane and Angel - boys' own scheme  
3: Michael and money - breadwinner's crisis

My analysis of the programmes will be divided into three sections: narrative and genre, representations, and textual invitations.

## 1. Narrative and Genre

### (i) *Narrative form*

The first point to note is the apparent simplicity of both texts' narratives. Typically, an episode features only three narratives. Further, these narratives, by soap opera terms, are remarkably self-contained. There is a minimum of narrative interweaving or significant character interrelationship. That is, though the same character may appear in more than one narrative, he or she seldom does so with narrative consequence. The character's important narrative action is generally restricted to his or her story. Each narrative in fact, in its important movements and in the course of an episode (or for that matter in the course of a week's episodes), features very few characters. The three narratives in Episode 1 of *Neighbours*, for example, are played out by three, four and four characters respectively. Again in soap opera terms (by which I mean any soap opera broadcast in the afternoon or evening on British terrestrial television), *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* have small casts on which to draw. Each has approximately twenty regularly-appearing characters, though the character/actor turnover for both programmes is, again generically, very high. Characteristically and in the episodes I have selected, approximately twelve of the cast will appear in an episode.

The narratives also restrict themselves spatially. In the twenty narratives I have examined, a particular story tends to be given only two sets or spaces in an episode. And again, unusual to the genre, each narrative tends to stick to its relatively independent space. Each text has its

communal spaces where characters and narratives unite, but these are not used narratively to the same extent as in other soap operas.

The length of narrative segments or scenes is also short in generic terms. One minute is the average time given to a scene in the episodes examined. Like the narratives, the scenes are quite self-contained. They are also, though, highly continuous. Characteristically, each scene features a narrative move that is important in its own right, that results from the move in the previous scene of that narrative, and that has some consequence for the next segment in that narrative.

An example may be helpful. Narrative 2 - *Lou and Madge* - of Episode 1 of *Neighbours* illustrates well what is a typical narrative process. In the first scene of this narrative (scene 3 of the episode) Toby confesses to Madge that he feels responsible for her rift with Lou. Madge assures Toby that he isn't to blame, and viewers that the romantic flame is still alight. Jokingly, wistfully, she equates the dog Bouncer's charm with that of Lou. In a transparent state of denial, Madge claims that the relationship never had a future, simultaneously speculating that Lou will already be looking for a new partner. In this scene, Toby functions to bring the previous scene's events forward, and to open a window onto Madge's true feelings. The scene is highly meaningful in its own right. Arguably, the scene's narrative meaning is clear to both short and long-term viewers of *Neighbours*. It is also a coherent domestic tableau and familial-intimate exchange open to historical location. In the programme's history, Madge is reinscribed as a strong, modern and humorous woman. Narratively, the possibility of the relationship's resurrection is made clear. Madge's



speculation at the close of the scene is characteristically heightened through the use of camera, framing and music, and points clearly and directly to the next scene of this narrative.

The next scene responds to Madge's speculation. In scene 4, we discover that Lou does want to retrieve the relationship, and is willing, with the help of Dorothy, to transform himself in order to do so. There are five segments of this narrative in Episode 1 of *Neighbours*. Apart from one, each is one minute in length and focusses on the possibility of Madge and Lou's reunion. The narrative moves between Madge and Lou, between Madge's kitchen and Dorothy's living room, and negotiates the romance/relationship's possibility. In the final scene of the narrative and the episode, reunion is recomplicated by a misunderstanding on the part of Toby. The narrative progresses, then, in a relatively circular process.

Like this one, the narrative segments of both programmes are short and raise a question that is responded to quickly, usually in the next segment of the given narrative. Often the question is answered immediately, as in the move from scene 3 to scene 4 in the *Lou and Madge* narrative, above. Even if this is not case, the scenes' brevity means that viewers seldom have long to wait for the response to a particular move or call. There are a number of points we can make with regard to this rapid call and response structure.

Again, it seems to defy what it has been suggested is typical to the soap opera genre. Waiting, says Tania Modleski, is soap opera's characteristic mode of reception. Viewers, especially female viewers, are kept in a constant state of anticipation (Modleski, 1982: 88). In *Neighbours*

and *Home and Away*, narrative enigmas, such as they are, are posed and solved quickly in a circular or negotiative process. The consequences of a climactic event are not endlessly delayed in favour of multiple recapitulations of that event, which is how John Ellis describes soap opera's typical form (Ellis, 1992: 149). Virtually all of the two programmes' scenes are concluded as climatic tableaux, and have a direct, consequential effect on the following scene's (in that narrative) events.

Ellis has also noted that, in distinction to cinema, television has always had to work hard to retain its audiences' interest and to institute a sense of connectedness between its characteristic segments. This is because of the media's technical and aesthetic differences, as well as their different contexts of reception (ibid., p.145ff). The narrative form of *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*, I would argue, achieves this connectedness very successfully. The rapid call and response structure keeps the three narratives in each episode immediate to viewers. The rapidity largely overcomes the problem of weighing real time and narrative time between scenes. Because each scene is so short, a sense of co-presence or unchronicled continuity remains high, and temporal suspension low. This is especially the case when a narrative remains in the same setting in successive scenes, as is frequently the case in the narratives I have examined.

The structure of the texts also works to create a strong sense of narrative time and space compression. Chronological continuity is observed by the texts, but only in the broadest fashion. Indeed the programmes frequently freeze a particular narrative for a number of days with no attempts to explain or paper over temporal discontinuities with the

rest of their communities' events. As David Buckingham has noted, the producers of soap operas like *EastEnders* attempt to give their viewers the sense that they have travelled through a day and week's events with a community's characters (Buckingham, 1987: ff). In *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*, viewers' sense is one of a constant 'meanwhile' rather than a journey through time and space.

As I have noted, the texts in fact make little pretence to any such realist narrative illusions. Frequently characters will announce their intention to visit another character and location in the bay/street and will arrive there immediately following their announcement and the conclusion of the given scene. This can be done using a character solely for the sake of connecting two scenes featuring different narratives, which occurs in Episode 3 of *Home and Away*. In this episode, Nick plays no important part in any of the three narratives, but is used at one point to spacially connect two of them. He appears in scene 14, the 6th scene of Narrative 2, *Shane and Angel*. Half way through the scene he leaves it, saying that he needs an ingredient for the curry he is cooking and is going to buy it at Alf's shop. The following scene, 15, is the penultimate scene in Narrative 3, *Michael and money*, and occurs in Alf's shop. Nick plays no part in this narrative, but connects scenes 14 and 15 (prior to Michael's arrival). If viewers were to mobilize a particular type of realist assumption, then they must calculate that Alf's shop is only a very few seconds/yards from Donald's house, from where Nick has come. More characteristically, a character steps out of one scene and location and into the next taking his/her narrative with him/her. This occurs frequently in the narratives I have considered.



Such elisions are common enough. However, none of the conventional attempts to signal or soften them are made. Indeed, while a text like *EastEnders* does its utmost to avoid such obvious temporal and spacial fractures, *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* revel in and are characterised by the ways in which they point them up. Extra-diegetic music, it could be argued, works to provide continuity in the face of such disjunctions. This, as John Ellis notes, is the case in some other popular television fiction (Ellis, 1992: 150). In *Home and Away* and *Neighbours*, though, I would argue that the nature of the music between scenes serves to heighten, not soften the bluntness of the cut. Characteristically in the narratives I have examined, music punctuates most scenes in an excessive fashion. It plays one important part in scenes' highly melodramatic, romantic or comic conclusions. In terms of narrative form, when a scene is excessively frozen and charged by camera and music to be followed immediately by the next scene in that narrative, elsewhere, the text of which I am most reminded is the American television series *Batman* (which of course featured less facial close-ups and complimented its scene-concluding music with a spinning bat).

As well as featuring short narrative segments and a minimum of characters and spaces, the two programmes' narratives are highly pared in terms of narrative action. Dramatically speaking, the narratives I have examined are remarkably flat. There are very few, if any, of the pivotal, climactic narrative events which Ellis identifies with the genre (ibid., p.149). The exception may be Narrative 2 of Episode 1, *Home and Away*. In this narrative, characters respond to the heart attack Donald suffered in the previous episode. It is a characteristic, but for the two programmes relatively rare dramatic narrative. It is in any case given the texts'

characteristic narrative treatment. That is, as well as being about Donald's potential death, it is at least as much and probably more about Bobby's ability to cope, Ailsa's ability to manage Bobby's coping, and Alf's inability to manage himself. In distinction to other soap operas, the endless discussions which Ellis identifies as resulting from key events tend to be narrative events in *Home and Away* and *Neighbours*. In this sense, beyond the repeated scenes at the start of each episode, there is little recapitulation as such in the programmes.

Arguably, every movement and word in both programmes is a narrative one. Virtually nothing is said or done that doesn't have a consequence for following scenes. This would seem to accord with Barthes' claim that "a narrative is never made up of anything other than functions" (Barthes, 1977: 89). (1). A scene from Narrative 2 of Episode 1, *Neighbours*, is a good example of this tendency. In the 4th scene of the *Lou and Madge* narrative (scene 12 of the episode), Dorothy visits Madge to confirm to herself that the Lou-Madge romance is still a possibility. At its current stage, Dorothy is the key intermediary and manager of the relationship. Dorothy enters Madge's living space (living room/kitchen) on the subterfuge that she seeks company. From the previous scenes we know that she is in fact extending her role as relationship broker. Toby, in the living room, lives in Dorothy's house under her guardianship. Sometimes he stays with his grandmother, Madge. Following Dorothy's entrance and greeting, Toby asks her if he can stay with his grandmother that night. Dorothy agrees, and Toby responds that he will come and collect his pyjamas later. In *Neighbours'* pared-down narrative form the exchange stands out because of its apparent lack of connection to the Lou-Madge romance narrative. We can guess that it is not

idle naturalism, but will be connected to a following scene in some way - and that we will find out which and how very soon. Three scenes later, the following scene in this narrative, Toby arrives at Dorothy's house to collect his pyjamas and thinks, mistakenly, that he has caught Dorothy and Lou in a romantic clinch.

After permitting Toby to stay that night with Madge, Dorothy enquires after Madge's feelings for Lou, championing him in the process. Madge denies that she has any feelings for Lou. Simultaneously, though, the camera excessively plays on the fact that Madge rubs her nose during her answer. This refers to the preceding scenes where Dorothy has been educating Lou in the art of body language, and confirms for Dorothy and viewers that Madge is in a state of denial. Madge asks Dorothy why she takes an interest. When Dorothy provides neighbourliness as an explanation, the held, final shot of the scene is Toby's suspicious and disbelieving face. This points clearly and directly to the misunderstanding Toby makes in the following scene of this narrative.

In this scene and all scenes of the *Lou and Madge* narrative, talk is the primary narrative action. In this sense it might be argued that all scenes consist of recapitulation and gossip. This may be so, but it is not gossip in the way in which Ellis or Geraghty (1981) describe it. Geraghty notes that "gossip very often has a part in the action itself" (ibid., p.24), and in *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*, gossip, when it occurs, is an integral part of the narrative action. However, characters don't draw together and recapitulate an episode or week's events in an habitual location. This is the common generic cementing or phatic feature which Geraghty and others have identified (Geraghty, 1981: 24). Rather, when the characters in *Home and Away* and *Neighbours*



gossip, that gossip nearly always constitutes action resulting from events in the previous scene of a given narrative; and it will almost certainly have a consequence for the scene that follows in that narrative.

Narrative 1 of Episode 1, *Home and Away*, provides a good example of this feature. In the 3rd scene of the narrative (scene 7 of the episode), Adam tells Ailsa that his friend Blake (Ailsa's foster son) seems to have turned against him. This action, ostensibly gossip, is directly driven by Blake's mood swing in the previous scene of this narrative. Blake's dialogue indicates that he now has faith in his father - excessively signalled as a villain - and so no longer needs Adam's support in an alien environment (the city, his father's hotel). Adam's response to the hotel scene engenders a mood swing in Ailsa, who we know will act on the information very soon. The held shot of Ailsa's concerned face at the close of scene 7 confirms this and points to coming action. In the next scene but one of this narrative, Ailsa's response is to tell her husband, Alf (Blake's foster father), that she is to go to the city to support/protect Blake. This points us/the narrative to Ailsa's visit, and is the next move in the struggle over Blake's guardianship.

Geraghty indicates that at times in soap opera it is "almost impossible to draw the line between action and comment on that action" (ibid., p.25). In *Home and Away* and *Neighbours*, I would argue that typically it is impossible to draw that line. Of course gossip serves to cement the Summer Bay and Ramsay Street communities. It does not, though, serve so much to bring narrative strands and the texts' diegetic worlds together. Its narrative function is much more direct

than phatic. In this sense there is in fact remarkably little of soap opera's characteristic phatic communication in the two programmes.

Geraghty's identification of a soap opera that does not entirely fit her generic analysis gives a clue to *Home and Away* and *Neighbours*' narrative form. *Crossroads*, Geraghty says, does not (did not) use gossip in the genre's typical cementing, community and narrative-combining way (Geraghty, 1981: 24n). Its lack of a narrative-friendly communal space inhibits it in this respect. *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* do have such spaces, and they do use them to bring characters and narratives together. They do this, though, in a relatively contained way, with a minimum of narrative interweaving or phatic gossip. And importantly, while spaces like the Bayside Diner or *Neighbours*' Coffee Shop are used most often as points of narrative departure, what typically happens there can and does happen in any of the texts' locations.

The consequence of this lack for *Crossroads*, says Geraghty, is that it gives the impression of consisting of a set of parallel narratives. This, I think, is also an accurate description of the structure of *Home and Away* and *Neighbours*. The texts do not practise parallelism for symbolic, tension-building, or realist temporal-spatial collision and effect. Rather the texts' characteristically three narratives run parallel in a relatively self-contained and generally simultaneous fashion. The narratives are, we may say, stripped, with comics being the pertinent analogy. Again here, the divergence of *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* from Christine Geraghty's generic norm is instructive. Geraghty notes that the promise of early 1980s British-produced soap operas to "'continue (their

cliffhangers) tomorrow/on Wednesday/next week' is almost invariably not fulfilled by the serials I am discussing, as it was by the movie serial or is still by the next segment of a comic or magazine plot." (ibid., p.10). Like comic or magazine strips, then, in their narrative form *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* answer their narrative questions rapidly and feature very few generically characteristic dramatic cliffhangers.

What is dramatic in both texts is the extent and frequency of characters' mood swings. Like gossip and dialogue, and generally inseparable from them, emotional transformation is the narrative action in *Home and Away* and *Neighbours*. In the twenty narratives I have examined, emotional transformation, combined with or resulting from advice or revelation, constitutes the narrative action and pivot in the majority of scenes, and at some point in all of the narratives. In Episode 1 of *Neighbours*, in his romantic negotiation with Lucy, Brad moves sharply from denial to anger to confession. In the same episode, Lou moves from a lack of interest in body language and a lack of faith in his ability to reunite with Madge to a belief in both. In Episode 1 of *Home and Away*, Blake moves from suspicion of his father, to an allayment of this suspicion and a betrayal of his friend, back to suspicion of his father. And in Narrative 1 of *Neighbours*' Episode 2, Julie moves rapidly from disgust at Philip's lack of communication, to spiteful action, to forgiveness and mild guilt, to transparent duplicity.

John Ellis notes that television's fictional segments frequently serve to convey a particular mood (Ellis, 1992: 148). *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* appear to take this televisual tendency to extremes. Their scenes don't so much frequently convey a particular mood as generally manifest a



sharp change in characters' moods. Excessive mood swings might indicate that *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* are melodramatic as well as soap operatic texts. Let us now consider how we might situate the programmes generically.

### (ii) *Generic style*

At various points above I have noted features which *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* do not seem to share with other soap operas. This is not to suggest that the programmes should not be thought of as soap operas. It does, though, begin to indicate what may be special to the texts. At the level of generic style, we also begin to witness, I think, the ways in which the programmes are different from other soap operas. I would argue that stylistically, more than any other soap operas broadcast on British terrestrial television, *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* are bricoleurs. (2). As Umberto Eco has suggested of other texts, both programmes do seem to enjoy plundering from archetypes; taking from a range of styles and genres familiar to modern popular culture.

The titles of both programmes change frequently. In visual style, *Neighbours* has favoured burlesque, touristic leisure world and ethnographic-scientific realism (an overhead, establishing photographic shot of a suburb). Its generally greater commitment to the first than *Home and Away* is indicated by the retention of its famous, hammy signature tune. Currently in fact (winter 1996/7), *Neighbours'* titles mix all three of these styles, making the gesture to its general magpie tendencies. *Home and Away's* titles change but are consistently touristic, and point to the text's fantastic leisure world. The titles' emphasis is always on

fun for all, and this seems somewhat at odds with the traditional love song the programme keeps for a signature tune.

Both programmes retain a commitment to traditional romantic love, and in the episodes I have examined, stylistically, *Neighbours* in fact features more straightforwardly romantic scenes than *Home and Away* - the latter text using its beach setting more often for therapy and narrative complication than uncomplicated romance. For the sake of a romantic setting, *Neighbours* takes us to unusual locales in Episodes 2 and 3. In Narrative 2 of Episode 2, Gaby and Wayne fish at Lassiter's lake. The lake is seen occasionally in *Neighbours*, but for two scenes in this narrative it, and the two characters are given an excessively (comic, magazine, tourist guide) romantic treatment. In Narrative 2 of Episode 3, *Neighbours*, for the apparent conclusion/climax of their romantic negotiation, Brad and Beth are given a romantic, idyllic coastline backdrop.

Both texts also feature characters to which different generic styles generally attach themselves. In Narrative 1 of Episode 1, *Neighbours*, there are two short, consecutive scenes in the Willis household which stylistically seem as close to situation comedy as soap opera. This is frequently the mode in which *Neighbours*' Doug Willis character operates. In the two scenes, scenes 2 and 5 of the episode, Pam vacuums the living room distractedly while worrying about her son's (Brad) psychological health. Doug, dumbly oblivious to her concerns, schemes to organise a blind date for his friend Jim - so crassly and bullishly that it can only go wrong. They are situation comedy's (but just as much

the romance comedy or the musical's) scatological, domestic, odd couple - underscored, in particular by light, easy-humour music and held, clownish facial expressions.

In *Home and Away*, Pippa Ross, and the Ross kitchen/living room in which we most often see her, largely owe their style to the television series and serials set in Australia or America in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries - wholesome stories of family struggle, survival and settlement, *The Waltons*, *The Sullivans* and *Snowy River: The McGregor Saga* being the most obvious examples. The lighting and colours of Pippa and her environment sharply contrast with other scenes and parts of Summer Bay, and it seems that the text is unwilling to relinquish some part of popular culture's historical imagination.

In the twenty narratives I have examined, both programmes give particular scenes distinctly and excessively noirish and melodramatic treatments. In the second and last scene (in this episode) of Narrative 4 of Episode 2, *Neighbours*, it is evening and Phoebe is lit in shadow. With this and creeping, dramatic music she is made to seem trapped in the house with a strange and potentially dangerous man, Russell. In the fourth scene of Narrative 1, Episode 1, *Home and Away*, it is night-time in the city and Blake and Les eat dinner in a spartan, unfriendly hotel room. The room is lit in shadow and is made claustrophobic as the scene continues. Through the blinds we see lights and can hear sounds of the city. The pitch of the music creeps upward. The threat that Les, and the city present to Blake is made plain in characteristically broad stylistic strokes.



In the fourth, very short scene of Narrative 2, Episode 2, *Home and Away*, the text dispenses with dialogue altogether (*Neighbours* does the same to more comic effect in Narrative 2 of Episode 3). The scene is an excess of noirish lighting and melodramatic music. Fin, at the height of her exam stress/denial, stumbles into a dimly lit bedroom with a tray of food. She collapses into a chair and pushes the tray to the back of her study desk. As the music rises, we are given a close-up of her hands fumbling with a bottle of drugs, and then her vacant, washed-out face as she takes them.

In Narrative 3 of Episode 1, *Neighbours*, we are shown another woman out of control in an excessively melodramatic scene. The fourth scene of this narrative (the eleventh of the episode) begins with a highly affected domestic tableau unusual to the text. Jim and Jill and Pam and Doug seem suffocated, frozen by the demands of bourgeois manners. They are sitting down to an elaborate lunch, and we get a medium portrait shot of the four characters and the table. Doug, who has arranged the Jim-Jill blind date, is the only character oblivious to the obvious tension. The scene lasts only a minute and closes with a dramatic - an archetypically melodramatic - rupturing of the gentility. Jill takes unexpected offence at what she imagines to be Jim's commentary on her ability as a mother, shouts at him and storms from the room leaving the others aghast.

This scene in particular might lead us to believe that the texts owe the greatest debt to preceding melodramatic forms. Like a great number of scenes in both texts, it is highly staged, highly episodic, and uses music, gesture, expression and framing in an excessive and transparent fashion. However, we must go beyond aesthetic style alone in order to assess the generic status of a particular text. We must

consider in which ways and to what effect style is combined with form. In so doing we will begin to identify what it is that the programmes privilege in their narratives and the broader discourses of which they are a part.

### (iii) Narrative and genre

In the previous chapter I made reference to Ien Ang's (1985) analysis of the American soap opera *Dallas*. Drawing on the work of various influential theorists of melodrama, in particular Peter Brooks, Ang argues that *Dallas* is a melodramatic text for, basically, the following reasons: *Dallas* has an excessively rise and fall conflictual structure. This narrative structure repeatedly and tragically ensnares *Dallas*' characters. All are victims and never achieve mastery over narrative events. The text points to the insignificance of individual life. The family mediates narrative events and is radically unstable. Characters can be happy neither in nor out of the family. *Dallas*' meaning exceeds narrative and dialogue. It is figured melodramatically - visually and through music. The status of the spoken word, says Ang, is relativized (Ang, 1985: 63ff).

To list Ang's melodramatic criteria like this is perhaps to reduce the complexity of her ideas. What is more important here, though, is that my analysis suggests that *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* are distinctly unmelodramatic by the narrative and generic terms that Ang applies. The two programmes' narratives are not excessive in the way in which Ang describes those of *Dallas*. Crises do not succeed one another at incredibly rapid speed, characterisation being sacrificed to extravagant incident (ibid., p.68). The twenty narratives I have examined are characterised by their

remarkable flatness and circularity in dramatic terms. There is a minimum of dramatic incident as such. At times it is difficult to think of the stories in dramatic terms at all. In the five narratives in Episode 2 of *Neighbours*, for example, three are virtually devoid of drama.

As I have noted, what does rise and fall sharply in *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* are the emotional states of the programmes' characters. Rather than the family, what tends to mediate events in the texts is the self. Certainly the family is a repeated point of conflictual and utopian return in both programmes. It is the self, though, that is the primary narrative point of axis in the episodes I have examined. The efforts in these episodes are after ideals that are placed at a higher premium than the family. Most obvious in the twenty narratives is the desire to be in a loving and committed relationship - most often a romantic, heterosexual one, but not always. As my narrative themes also indicate, parenting as well as romance is one of both texts' primary interests. Frequently inseparable from the desire for an equal and strong intimate relationship is the wish, the narrative drive to be at peace with oneself. This, for example, is what Jill clearly is not in Narrative 3 of Episode 1 of *Neighbours*; and it is what Fin will achieve after still more advice and self-trials in Narrative 2, Episode 2, *Home and Away* (I have already referred to the dialogue-less scene in this narrative; in all of its other scenes Fin is advised that she is working too hard). Both of these ideals - to be in a good relationship and to be at one with oneself - are not mediated through the fragile family, but revolve, rather, around characters' ability to manage themselves.



Fin and Jill are not so much victims of the family, of other characters, or of a fitful, tragic narrative structure; they are, rather, victims of themselves. This feature characterises the twenty narratives I have examined. In Narrative 3 of Episode 3, *Home and Away*, Michael is a victim of his masculine sense of himself. In Narrative 1 of Episode 2, *Home and Away*, Sally is a victim of her emergent sexuality. In Narrative 1 of Episode 1, *Neighbours*, Brad is a victim of his denial of affection for Lucy - the same being true in Narrative 2 of Episode 3, only that it is Beth that Brad denies being in love with on this occasion. In none of these cases is this incidental. Along with how it is that one should behave, it is what these narratives are primarily about.

As well as victims of themselves, the characters in the episodes I have considered are repairers of themselves. They are not shown to be powerless in the face of apparently arbitrary narrative events. In a generally circular process, characters learn how to put their torn souls back together, and how to relate. In the twenty narratives I have examined (with the benefit of hindsight), almost all of the regular characters face two possible futures. They will either leave Summer Bay or Ramsay Street, having in some way been repaired/rehabilitated, for a better future (marriage, university, a new start). Or, they will die dramatically. In this sense it is arguable that the texts' ideals are as much achieved as frustrated, in both the long and short term. This is supported, I would argue, by a narrative that might initially seem to support Ang's theory of melodrama.

In Narrative 2 of Episode 1, *Home and Away*, Bobby at first seems to be the victim of an arbitrary narrative event - her father, Donald's heart attack. The sequence of the

narrative, though, in only one episode, shows that Bobby is not powerless. It also illustrates that, as I have argued, dialogue is not relative or meaningless but constitutes effective narrative action in the two programmes. In Episode 1, this narrative is at least as much about how Bobby copes with Donald's attack and puts herself back together as it is about Donald's potential death (not coincidentally, if Donald was to die and leave the serial viewers would have been warned of this weeks in advance in a variety of magazines sold in Britain). In the first scene of this narrative (scene 2 of the episode), Bobby chastises herself for taking the wrong advice from Alf regarding Donald's health. She should have followed her own feelings. In the next scene (5), Bobby castigates Alf for telling her that Donald did not need a holiday, reducing him to a state of mumbling admission and apology. In the following two scenes (8 and 10), Bobby finds the effective support she has missed in the advice of doctors and her partner, Greg. She falls into the arms of one of the text's most skilful repairers, Ailsa. Bobby confesses to Ailsa that she doesn't know how strong she would be, how she would cope if Donald were to die. Ailsa remains calm and counsels Bobby effectively. The four scenes in this narrative could be entitled Frustration, Castration, Reunion, Rebuild. They point to very similar moves in the texts' other narratives, and to the programmes' characteristic process of self-transformation. In arguing why *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* do not meet Ien Ang's melodramatic criteria, we begin to map out what the two programmes are as well as what they are not. Under the heading of narrative and genre, though, I think that we might most usefully expand on earlier references I made to what the programmes share with some comics.

I have noted that both texts take a primary interest in romance, intimate relationships, advice, confession and self-transformation. The programmes' stories seem to lack drama or narrative tension, and their episodic segments succeed in being both self-contained and highly and transparently connected. These features make a strong connection with Martin Barker's analysis of the now defunct magazine aimed at teenage girls, *Jackie*.

Barker identifies how, during the course of its publication, *Jackie*'s picture stories seemed to lose faith and interest in not only traditional romantic narratives, but in linear narrative forms generally (Barker, 1989: 178ff). Broadly, the strips became more episodic and lost any obvious narrative drive or tension. The ideal of true love fell secondary to an increasing emphasis on self-evaluation (ibid., p.171ff). Instead of the search for true love, latterly, *Jackie*'s picture stories' most ostensible imperative seemed to be a dual one: be true to yourself, transform yourself.

On first inspection, at least eight of the narratives I have examined pursue romance and heterosexual union. Not exclusive to this, though, *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*'s primary interest is the one identified by Barker in latter editions of *Jackie* - the negotiation and management of intimate relations and self. Barker notes that from the early 1980s *Jackie* dispensed with romantic narratives altogether, while retaining a commitment to heterosexual union (Barker, 1989: 193). *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* seem to have followed a similar path. The very first episodes of *Neighbours* (transmitted in Australia in 1986 and shown in 1994 by the BBC in Britain - BBC 1, 12.7.94) featured a traditional romantic narrative (by the terms of Frye, 1978



and Radway, 1987). The romance between Scott and Kim follows a quite linear pattern and is permeated by the problems of 'being a teenager'. In this sense, *Neighbours*' earliest romance is effectively a romantic episode from a teenage magazine's problem page given a narrative form. This, says Barker, is how best to understand Jackie's picture stories in the late 1970s (Barker, 1989: 190). The 1980s, Barker argues, saw romance and narrative wholly superseded in Jackie's picture stories by the project of the problem page - be true to yourself, transform yourself.

The same is generally true of *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*. In the twenty narratives I have examined, and in recent years, traditional romantic pursuits and their narrative structures have been short-circuited in favour of an immediate examination of the management of intimate relations and self. This said, both texts continue to invest considerable faith not only in heterosexual union, but in romance. In this sense, while *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* have become increasingly negotiative in their structures, at one level they can still usefully be thought of as problem pages given a narrative form.

Like problem pages, in the episodes I have examined the primary injunction of *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* is to self-evaluation and transformation. Occasionally this call seems to come from nowhere but within. After Jill storms out of scene 11 of Episode 1, *Neighbours*, for example, she returns in the next scene of this narrative (14) to apologize, confess and seek counsel from Pam and Doug without apparent prompting. More often, though, key intermediaries impel others to examine and change themselves, usually to rapid effect.

Barker notes how *Jackie's* picture strips constructed and depended on a peculiar economy where emotions fluctuated rapidly (ibid., p.164). The same is true of *Home and Away* and *Neighbours*. The intermediaries in this sense seem to be brokers intent on keeping the stock of emotions high; on keeping the stock of rounded, repaired and fully relating selves high. In the narratives I have considered, the primary or most skilful managers of the texts' economies of self are Dorothy and Pam in *Neighbours* and Ailsa and Pippa in *Home and Away*. Importantly, though, it is not only mothers, professionals or females who can perform the role of manager-transformer. The logic of the texts is that all selves are imperfect and so transformative. All will at some stage need repair, and so all must be able to manage and support. In Episode 1 of *Neighbours*, Brad, in denial, is counselled by Pam and Cameron. In Episode 3, Brad rapidly transforms and counsels Beth to recognise herself/her true feelings. In Episode 1 of *Neighbours*, Lou receives lessons in self-transformation from Dorothy, and is able to provide the same service for Julie in Episode 3. And, in Episode 2 of *Home and Away* Michael is doing all the counselling of damaged teenagers, but falls foul of his highly gendered (masculine breadwinner) self in Episode 3.

Thus, with the help of Martin Barker's analysis of *Jackie*, we begin to get a clearer sense of *Neighbours* and *Home and Away's* narrative and generic form. The texts seem to share most, in this respect, with comic strips and problem pages, and to combine both. This connection demands greater theoretical and historical analysis, and I shall return to it in the conclusion of this chapter and in the chapters following this one. Now though, under the heading of textual analysis, it will be useful to consider some of the characteristic representations of the programmes.

## 2. Representations

### (i) Characters

On first examination the characters in *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* are sketched in very broad strokes. A number of the characters are made recognisable sometimes to the point of parody. This is with regard to the type of character they are presented as, and to the gendered nature of their behaviour. Here are some examples.

In *Home and Away* we are offered:

Pippa: An earth-mother who dresses in flowing garments of ochre and green. Outdoors, she is seldom seen without a basket or a troubled teenager in her arms. Indoors, she bakes perpetually, for her own family and for the Summer Bay family (she supplies the Bayside Diner). Pippa has her own children, and fosters a number of teenagers too. When we see Pippa in the kitchen of her large, nineteenth century, white, hillside house (called Summer Bay House), her domestic scenes/presence are always accompanied by the sounds of birds chirping outside. Pippa is frequently turned to for advice, and is usually shown to be wise in her judgements. Recently (autumn 1996), Pippa was awarded the Order of Australia.

Alf: A reactionary corner shop owner with a short temper but a heart of gold. Alf appears flushed and frequently irritated. He favours discipline and traditional values, and was once a locally famous sportsman. Alf has a stronger accent than most of Summer Bay's characters, and is the only



one who refers to others as sheilas or bludgers. Alf prides himself on his lack of pretention, and will not hesitate to tell others the truth as he sees it. Alf is shown frequently to be unwise in his judgements.

Blake: A surly, pretty, confused and questioning teenager. Blake is presented as being awkward in his movements, speech and manners - he practises "studied inarticulateness" (Hall and Whannel, 1964: 284). Blake looks and sounds more American than the other Summer Bay teenagers. In his bedroom is a large poster of a still taken from *Rebel Without a Cause*. Like the other teenagers, Blake is frequently seen in the Bayside Diner which is filled with icons from 1950s American popular culture. Not coincidentally, Blake's surname is Dean.

In *Neighbours* we are offered:

Dorothy: A headteacher who in all her moves and looks mixes modernism and traditionalism. Dorothy wears cardigans and sensible skirts, ties her hair back and has plain, dark-framed glasses. Dorothy drives a red sports car and enjoys letting her hair down and slipping into a kaftan when the occasion invites it. Dorothy's accent is as much English as Australian. Her living room is a modernist mix of European and Asian artefacts. It points to her travels, her wide knowledge, her open mind. Dorothy enjoys ridiculing convention, and is always keen to share a joke. She also knows when to be serious and firm-minded. Dorothy is respected and liked by all members of the Ramsay Street community, and is frequently turned to for advice.

Brad: A tall, tanned, blond surfer; long-haired, broad-boned, slim-hipped and blue-eyed. Brad wants no more than to surf and to be your friend. He doesn't understand confrontation, competition, business. He smiles and dreams and listens to the sound of ocean waves on his *Walkman*. Brad feels comfortable only in ripped, faded denim and surf-label T-shirts. Brad drives to the surf in his clapped-out 1960s American saloon. When galvanized to think of his future by his mother, Brad discovers his artistic talent and decides to become a surf board designer and builder. When a large corporation discovers his talent, Brad's lawyer cousin, Cameron, saves him from being ripped-off. Business opportunities (a wealthy businessman takes a shine to Brad and gives him a job) and attractive young women seem to fall into Brad's lap. He feels uncomfortable with the former (rejects the job), and seems oblivious to the advances made by the latter. Everybody likes Brad.

The programmes also feature or have featured, a bleached-blond, buxom, gushing, eye-fluttering young woman called Marilyn; a diminutive, dictatorial, Italian father called Beneuito; and a policeman called Nick.

The programmes' characters at this level are familiar and funny. They begin to explain the texts' reception as comic, as pantomime. With the help of Martin Barker, again, I think that we should steer clear of thinking of the programmes' characters as stereotypical. As Barker argues, to invoke the notion of the stereotype is to enter into a familiar discourse about representations - one that tends to move between the poles of bad stereotypes and good knowledge, and which is seldom helpful to analysis (Barker, 1989: 196ff). Persuasively, Barker shows that discussions of stereotypes tend to follow an empiricist logic. This, he argues,

privileges unique individualism and notions of harmful influence at the expense of broader theories of power or any concept of social groupings. Identifying stereotypes, Barker argues, is a practice of distinction, as much about securing the institutional authority of psychologists and educationalists as about extending understanding.

The sketches of characters I have provided above indicate that at this level there is little to be unmasked regarding *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*'s characters. They are not bad representations to be seen through. More usefully, they should be thought of as familiar archetypes of popular culture which the texts take pleasure in pointing up. I am thinking here of the way in which Umberto Eco discusses the archetypes of popular films - films, he says, which practise "extreme intertextual awareness" (Eco, 1987: 209). More especially, I am thinking of Colin Mercer's historical and theoretical analysis of the emergence of the types of popular culture. Mercer argues that in nineteenth century Britain and France particular ways of reading modern characters became embedded in popular belief (Mercer, 1988: 57). This, he says, was by dint of the sheer proliferation of new forms of entertainment and their critical relation to adjacent medical, political and educational spheres. A broad investment was made in the reading of character, and this drew especially on the techniques of phrenology and physiognomy.

I will return to the importance of Mercer's analysis. Here I want to argue that *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* continue the genealogical process he identifies. We recognise and take pleasure - laugh at and feel superior to - the texts' characters because of their sometimes specific intertextual links (Blake/James Dean), but more often because of their



broad belonging to the types of modern popular culture. From my character sketches, and from my analysis of the texts' narratives, it might seem that character type is mapped onto a gendered hierarchy of narrative function. This is certainly true to an extent. Generally, the best managers of torn selves, the characters which impel others to self-examination and transformation are female - and in the case of Pippa, highly feminized. Pippa seems to be the epitome of the universal mother-figure theorised by Sherry Ortner - an intermediary, a servicer; an expert in mediation and communion trapped in the liminal domestic; a figure always closer to nature than culture whose task it is to ease the passage of others from nature to culture (Ortner, 1974: 83ff).

Earth-mother Pippa and boorish, masculine Alf are certainly at opposite ends of the skilled intermediary hierarchy in *Home and Away*. In the narrative and discursive projects of both texts, though, it is important that just as Pippa's skills are not foolproof, so is Alf at times shown to be a sensitive manager of relationships. As I have already noted, the texts' logic is that no article is ever the finished one; everyone makes mistakes in their self-management, and is at some point in need of help and repair. Even *Neighbours'* Helen Daniels has been shown to stop short of ethical immaculacy. Though some are consistently more skilled, it is arguable that all characters perform the same broad narrative and discursive function: they learn how to manage themselves and their intimate relationships, and teach others to do the same.

Important to mention, too, when considering the closeness of Pippa to nature, is Dorothy's professional status and general urbanity; Beth's (*Neighbours*) recent qualification

as a builder; Ailsa (*Home and Away*) and Gaby's (*Neighbours*) small businesses; Lauren's (*Neighbours*) entrepreneurial aspirations. As my sketch indicates, the other character closest to nature in the two texts is male - Brad. And, after Pippa, one of Summer Bay's most skilled intermediaries is the schoolteaching, guiter playing, Jesus-like, Luke.

In their representation of characters the texts perpetuate, point up, and try to avoid predictable gender dichotomies. More than this, the texts' project frequently is the negotiation of modern gender identities. In Narrative 2 of Episode 1, *Neighbours*, it is the philandering masculinity of Lou's self which Dorothy is helping him to overcome. In Narrative 3 of Episode 3, *Home and Away*, Michael is finding it painfully hard to relinquish the image he has of himself as the male, breadwinning head of the household. And in later episodes Pippa and Michael need the help of a marriage guidance counselor because Pippa is hogging, or is perceived by Michael to be hogging family decisions and the respect of the children. In Narrative 2 of Episode 2, *Neighbours*, Gaby (as is very frequently the case with this character) is torn between her desire to be wooed and her need to be strong and autonomous - between her cinderella and her cowgirl selves, to use Hochschild's acute terms (Hochschild, 1994: 10). Indeed in Narrative 1 of Episode 3, *Neighbours*, Gaby teaches Jack the art of sexual relations only then to be blind to his philandering (she has taught him too well!) apparently because of her need to be loved/in love. This story is in fact a good example of the texts' preferred negotiative structure, and of their broader discursive drive.

At this point in the *Jack and Gaby* narrative (the episode broadcast on 3.10.94), Jack is clearly marked as a villain. The narrative seems tragic in the way in which Ang (1985)

theorizes *Dallas* as melodrama. Gaby is a victim of Jack's nastiness and seems unable to help herself. We know more than Gaby, but are equally powerless. However, like almost all of the villains in *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* in recent years, Jack is not so much a force to be overcome (though Gaby does this by transforming/waking up to herself in later episodes) as a confused self in the painful process of transformation. Oversexed Jack, it turns out, needs therapy, and the teacher he turns to again (you taught me too well!) is Gaby. In a narrative that sees Jack go from naivety to gross insensitivity to confusion to understanding, and Gaby from assertive romancer to powerless victim to strong healer, Jack and Gaby are finally married and depart the serial for a better future.

Here again, *Neighbours* seems closer to advice column than melodrama. The worlds of *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* are not "subsumed by an underlying manichaeism"; their narratives do not "create the excitement of...drama by putting us in touch with the conflicts of good and evil played out under the surface of things", which is Peter Brooks' influential understanding of melodrama (Brooks, 1976: 4). Even with regard to the most temporary characters, the programmes don't so much refuse nuance, insisting on pure, integral concepts (ibid., p.40). Rather, they make transparent and narratively depend on the nuances of self and relations management. (3).

We shall return to what is special to *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*'s characters under textual invitations. Now, though, I would like to consider the ways in which the programmes' settings and sets are represented.



## (ii) *Settings and Sets*

### *Rural virtue*

When considering the texts' generic style and characters I have suggested that *Home and Away* especially seems unwilling to relinquish a particular type of discourse about nature and the past. This is mediated in particular through the character of Pippa Ross and her large house and family. The house sits on the hill overlooking the community and is called Summer Bay House. Arguably, its name points to the central narrative and metaphorical function which Pippa and her house perform. Characteristically, each episode of *Home and Away* features at least one long-distance establishing shot of Summer Bay House. In each of the three episodes of *Home and Away* I have examined in detail there is at least one narrative which occurs in the Ross family's living space (kitchen/living room) in which Pippa has a greater or lesser involvement (in Episode 2 there are two). Pippa and her house are all earth tones. Her hair and her clothes, her wooden and utilitarian cupboards, tables, doors, floors, chairs and settee are all browns, greens and reds. Through the slats in the kitchen window streams sun and the incessant chirp of birds. At their most condensed these signs come to mean Pippa-nature-eternity. Husbands, foster children, crises and even the character's actress come and go, but, like the sunshine and Summer Bay, Pippa will always be there - there to mend, comfort and regenerate.

Pippa, her characteristic actions and environment, seem to represent the country way analysed by Judith Kapferer (1990: 101) and Graeme Turner (1986: 52); a way of honest toil, a dogged spirit, and above all the determination to stay, to survive. Arguably, at their romantic height such images serve to mask colonial origins and a deep-rooted conservatism. They also connect with broader images of Summer Bay as a country town and Australia as a nation. The ideal of a country town and of a country-minded sensibility, argues Kapferer, remains one of the most popular and potent conceptions of Australianness (Kapferer, 1990: 89). Kapferer argues that this ideal is sustained across a number of public and commercial discourses, including popular film and television. Rural virtues of independence, energy, sincerity, good judgement and a defence of the family repeat themselves (ibid., p.98).

To some extent, *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* contribute to this stock of images. Pippa and her environment are the most obvious and frequent contributors, though in *Home and Away* Alf's Victorian country store and the beach also play important parts. In *Neighbours*, I have already referred to two highly romanticised scenes in the narratives I have examined - Gaby and Wayne's lakeside fishing expedition in Episode 2, and Brad and Beth's coastline union and held kiss in Episode 3. These are two of numerous occasions when *Neighbours* goes beyond its suburban setting to point in various ways to the virtues of nature or the countryside (though like *Home and Away* it also uses wilderness/the bush to signal threat).

In the narratives which I have considered, the most obvious point at which a dichotomy between country and city seems to be instituted is in the *Les and Blake* narrative of Episode

1, *Home and Away*. At this point in this narrative, Les is associated with villainy and the city in a very uncomplicated fashion. In his large and unfriendly bar, Les exploits his staff and is rude to his customers (one of whom he later assaults). As I have already noted, in Les' hotel room the room, Les and the city are made to seem to be closing in on Blake. All this is in sharp contrast to the rural idyll, friendly, bright, therapeutic spaces and extended family of emotional supporters he has left behind in Summer Bay. Les is one of numerous characters which have come to Summer Bay as transparently city types, and so, initially as villains. Usually and characteristically it is Alf who voices the community/text's initial hostility: "He can go back to the city where he belongs", was Alf's first opinion of Les.

As Raymond Williams has argued, the fantasy of a rural idyll, to which *Home and Away* in some ways contributes, consistently opposes itself to the corrupt city (Williams, 1975: 62ff). The rural/urban dichotomy has its genesis in the industrial and urban transformations of eighteenth and nineteenth century Britain and Europe, reproducing itself in the literary and artistic traditions following this (ibid.). As such, as Williams argues, rural fantasies are neither of nor about the countryside per se:

"What is idealised is not the rural economy, past or present, but a purchased freehold house in the country, or 'a charming coastal retreat'...This is then not a rural but a suburban or dormitory dream." (Williams, 1975: 62).

Like Williams, Judith Kapferer argues that the ideal of the country town is neither intrinsically rural nor Australian. The country/city dichotomy may be given an Australian twist



or 'meaning load' in programmes like *The Flying Doctors* or *A Country Practice* (and I would add *Home and Away* and *Neighbours*, the latter of which Kapferer mistakenly, I think, calls urban), but "the source of such distinctions...lies in the refraction of Australian rural mythology through the construction of ideologies which are, in the end, urban and international." (Kapferer, 1990: 89). Such programmes, says Kapferer, present an urban fantasy of life beyond city limits. What such fantasies omit, she argues, is that life in country towns, especially for women, can be lonely, unfriendly and lacking in education and employment opportunities and essential welfare services (ibid., p.98).

As I have indicated, *Neighbours* and especially *Home and Away* do contribute to the types of ideals analysed by Williams and Kapferer. However, neither programme singularly re-institutes the country/city dichotomy to the extent which might be suggested especially by Kapferer's arguments. I would argue that the texts might more usefully be thought of as representations of liminal zones, spaces which draw on and contribute to a number of fantasies and ideals.

#### *Liminal zones: utopia, hell, purgatory*

The narrative use to which *Home and Away's* beach is frequently put might lead us again to representations and discourses privileging the timeless virtues of nature. Repeatedly in *Home and Away* all characters, but especially young characters, go to the beach in search of answers and repair. Usually, another character will come to join them and will help them to rebuild. At the height of Pippa Ross' therapeutic powers, when the character was untouchable as an

expert healer (the text began to show that even Pippa had flaws and needed help around 1994 - British transmissions), it was nearly always Pippa who miraculously appeared to sweep a young, broken character into her arms. The meaning of this repeated ritual initially seems plain: "(L)ying in it, cheek against it, the length of one's shivering body warmed by it. What is it about an ocean beach that so marvellously pacifies a child's discontents?" (Blakemore in Game, 1990: 110). For Ann Game, in her analysis of Australia's Bondi beach, the answer is clear. The beach (especially, in *Home and Away*, when combined with Pippa) is that familiar point of return, to plentitude and to imaginary unity; to nature and the uncanny of the maternal body - "the place where each one of us lived once upon a time and in the beginning." (Freud in Game, 1990: 109).

In the *Home and Away* narratives I have examined one characteristic return to the beach is made. In the third scene (scene 6) of Episode 2's *Sally and Damien* narrative, Sally sits on the beach, sobbing, facing the waves. She is punishing herself and is seeking comfort having been caught kissing her foster brother, Damien, when he was asleep. (Sally fled from the living room in horror when she realized that Pippa had witnessed the kiss.) In keeping with what I have said regarding the apparent threat to Pippa's therapeutic sovereignty, it is Michael (Pippa's husband, Sally's foster father) who appears on the beach in this scene to counsel Sally - successfully, and against the advice issued by Pippa two scenes ago.

As Game suggests, a young character turns to nature and an idyllic setting to be regenerated. Beyond what the beach and the waves may represent, though, Sally's therapy is paternal not maternal. Further, in this scene *Home and Away*'s rural

setting seems as much surveillant and oppressive as it does fantastic. Sally is not only worried about how she must learn to govern her emergent sexuality, but also about the Summer Bay community's judgements over her apparent inability to do so - the latter concern given justification in later scenes.

In a further step beyond the initial notion that the beach/Summer Bay is nature, is idyllic, we should consider the other significatory or discursive parts played by *Home and Away*'s beach setting. When *Home and Away*'s titles or narratives take us to the beach, they draw on and extend our imagination of a national space: "the beach is Australia" (Game, 1990: 105). Ann Game has shown how discourses surrounding Australia's most famous beach, Bondi, have consistently represented it as uniquely Australian and cosmopolitan; an egalitarian haven where all that is Australian and all that is best about Australia combine. David Rowe advances a number of the themes raised by Game. Tourist industry projections, says Rowe, maintain an imaginary Australian space and way of life that is sensual, egalitarian, sun-drenched and fun-filled. Contrary to what is both an internal and external image of Australia as a world of leisure - to which, it is clear *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* contribute - Rowe notes that the average time devoted to leisure by Australians has in fact decreased since the mid-1970s, this being especially the experience of women (Rowe, 1993: 258). Those working under the tourist gaze, says Rowe, are most often female. Women perform the emotional work of smiling and pleasantly interacting with consumers in a series of 'moments of truth'. The city and this emotional labour, the supports for Australia's leisure and tourist industries, argues Rowe, are kept backstage in popular images.



Despite or because of the fact that Australia's population is highly suburbanized and concentrated, the myth of a purer rural time pertains in Australian culture (ibid., p.259). As a result, argues Rowe, many Australian communities exist not only geographically but symbolically in liminal zones - country towns, outer suburbia, dormitory settlements where in various ways the boundaries between nature and culture are blurred (Rowe, 1993: 266 n3). Since white settlement, Rowe argues, these liminal zones witness a contradictory pull between hedonism and asceticism. And, in the struggle between conservative and populist discourses, between accusations of indolence and celebrations of God-given pleasures in the lucky country, hedonism, says Rowe, has won out (ibid., pp.256-258). Repeatedly foregrounded, argues Rowe, is the image of Australia as a timeless paradise: "The ideological power of touristic imagery lies first in its overt articulation of fantasy - the dream holiday in paradise." (Rowe, 1993: 261).

In their settings, *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* assuredly do connect with Rowe's touristic ideals, and with his analysis of Australianness. His critique, though, is as much of consumerism as it is of the illusory nature of representations of Australia. Further, we should note that in both programmes all aspects of what Rowe suggests remains women's work is decidedly given frontstage and superordinate not subordinate status. And, as I have already argued, the programmes' logic is that any character, female or male, can and should provide emotional support when required. *Home and Away* and *Neighbours*' utopias are as much part of modern entertainment and commodity dreams and aesthetics as of the contemporary myths of Australia. As Frith and Horne have indicated, a particular type of fantasy, a consumer-led

aesthetic emphasising sensuality and abundance has its genesis in the urban spectacles of nineteenth century Europe (Frith and Horne, 1987: 11). It is to this world, as well as to a rural idyll (in the case of *Home and Away*), that the two programmes invite their viewers to travel. (4).

Richard Dyer's analyses of consumption, entertainment and utopia provide, I think, one of the most useful ways in which to understand the liminal worlds represented by *Home and Away* and *Neighbours*. Dyer follows Enzenberger to argue that modern entertainments should not be thought of as ways in which the false needs of mass culture are met. Rather, popular forms should be understood to be *simultaneously* repressive and emancipatory:

"The attractive power of mass consumption is based not on the dictates of false needs, but on the falsification and exploitation of quite real and legitimate ones without which the parasitic process of advertising would be redundant." (Enzenberger, 1972: 113).

The need in which Dyer takes the greatest interest in his analysis of light entertainment television (Dyer, 1973) and the musical (Dyer, 1981) is obliteration. Effective entertainment, says Dyer, is able to remove us from everyday realities to a world where the energy of leisure is in the air. There is a hard to articulate feeling of intensity, of "peace, abundance, leisure, equality..." (Dyer, 1981: 182). This affectivity of living is largely created by spectacle and what Dyer calls non-representational signs - colour, texture, movement, rhythm, melody, camerawork (ibid., p.178). In some texts such obliteration happens only momentarily. The clearest example, argues Dyer, is when musicals' numbers break free of the strictures of realist

narrative (Dyer, 1981: 186). At other times, non-representational elements combine to effect a text's entire removal to another world (ibid., p.187). *Home and Away* and *Neighbours*, I would argue, come into this latter category.

Both texts have their heightened affective-utopian moments. The titles make the clearest gesture to a fantastic world of leisure and consumption, and both *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* enjoy on occasion spectacular pauses in narrative events (fun fairs, shopping sprees, sports events). (5). Importantly, though, what is special to these moments is never entirely absent from or autonomous to the texts' narratives. Dyer sketches the real needs and utopian desires that entertainment meets, plotting these next to their genesis in capitalist society (Dyer, 1981: 183). They are: abundance, energy, intensity, transparency and community. In various ways and to varying degrees, all of these play a part in all of the twenty narratives I have examined - and in most scenes. In both programmes there is an abundance of: sunshine; young, tanned, attractive, honed, thinly and brightly-clad bodies (this being especially the case in *Home and Away*, where in the diner, the surf club and on the beach young bodies are the narratives' backdrop - the heightened mise-en-scene, we might say); consumption (that is, eating and drinking - the narratives' setting is frequently the coffee bar, diner or domestic meal table) and the time to do so. Such abundance also provides a sense of energy - as do: the speed of the narratives, effectiveness of dialogue and advice; the use of held expression and close-up to conclude most scenes; and the use of music in both programmes.



In *Neighbours* and especially *Home and Away*, music is used to underscore narratives, but also it frequently outstrips their dramatic weight. The music that accompanies the opening, reminder scenes of both programmes is a good example of this tendency. (6). In fact, rather than merely outstripping, in generic terms the music might seem at odds with the substance of the narrative scene it punctuates. While the narratives may incline to melodramatic realism, the music - cha-cha, rococo, camp pop... - insists on the texts' light entertainment (comic, pantomime) status. A good example of this is the music that concludes the third scene (scene 7) of Narrative 1, Episode 1, *Home and Away*. The held close-up of Ailsa's face indicates her concern regarding Blake's plight in the city. In other soap operas, Ailsa's face might signal helplessness, the tragic gap between wishes and realities. In *Home and Away*, though, it points to rapid narrative action. To an extent, this is underscored by the music that accompanies it. The intra-diegetic Muzak on the juke box in the diner, where Ailsa is, characteristically becomes extra-diegetic and heightens to meet the close-up of her face. In cha-cha style it exclaims No more!, and at one level this points to Ailsa's thoughts and coming action - enough is enough, now to save my foster son. This aesthetic strategy is used on other occasions in *Home and Away*, across narratives of various substance. It combines with other affective elements to communicate energy and possibility; to transport us to a world where 'the energy of leisure is in the air'.

Moving slightly wide of setting, but staying with affective elements and the construction of a utopian community, Christine Geraghty also applies Dyer's utopian schema to the emotionally-laden close-ups of characters' faces in soap opera. In British and American soap operas, Geraghty argues,

such shots communicate transparency and intensity (Geraghty, 1991: 123). The texts are able to reveal or express unusually authentic relations - between characters, or between soap operas and their viewers:

"Soaps...offer moments of intensity when emotion is expressed, as Dyer puts it, 'directly, fully, unambiguously'. Such moments may occur between characters when feelings of love or...anger and hatred are expressed without the characters stopping to think or fearing the consequences. What is valued is this capacity for expression even if the outcome is not always a happy one...(I)ntensity is also a feature of the relationship between the audience and these characters so that the full emotional intensity is often expressed directly to the audience when the character is alone..." (ibid.).

This type of transparency is, I think, a central feature of *Home and Away* and *Neighbours*. Both texts do not so much offer moments when emotion is expressed 'directly, fully, unambiguously'. Rather, they narratively depend upon and revolve around such expressions. The search for an authentic, honest relation not only between characters but with oneself is a primary driving force behind most of the narratives I have examined. Geraghty's analysis of character transparency focusses on gender and particular characters. Moments of intense communicative or emotional transparency attach themselves to key female characters in the programmes she analyses. As a result, viewers know these characters more intimately than others (Geraghty, 1991: 123). To some extent the same may be true for *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*. However, the fact that by the texts' terms authentic communication and relations are so excessively frustrated and achieved by all characters takes the two programmes closer to utopia than any of the soap operas analysed by Geraghty. In *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*, not only do all

characters inhabit the same utopian spaces, generally they all experience the same narrative problems: how to successfully manage intimate relations and self. And while some characters tend to be better at doing this than others, it is important that all are afforded the possibility to, and at some stage do achieve it. In Narrative 1 of *Home and Away* viewers are given privileged access to Ailsa's concerned face. The same, though, is true of Brad's torn face at the conclusion of the fourth scene (scene 6) of Narrative 1, *Neighbours*; and in this narrative it is women, but especially men who make all the efforts after transparent, highly emotional communication. Like Luke in *Home and Away*, Cameron, in this narrative and generally, is an energetic, key relationship/community rebuilders.

Geraghty argues that Dyer's utopian possibilities spread themselves across the five soap operas she examines (*Dallas*, *Dynasty*, *EastEnders*, *Brookside*, *Coronation Street*). Each gives emphasis to different parts of his scheme, and the genre as a whole should be considered to offer the fullest promise of utopia (ibid., p.118). All five, Geraghty argues, share the energy produced by soap opera's rapidly paced and fragmented narratives. She shares other scholars' arguments regarding the narrative complexity of soaps' narratives, but points to the importance of swift movements between storylines and rapid character transformations (pp.118-119). *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*, I would argue and my narrative analysis suggests, lack the hermeneutic complexity of other soap operas. The latter two features to which Geraghty makes reference, though - especially the centrality of speedy self-transformation - begin to compensate for this and combine with affective elements to lend the texts considerable energy and intensity. While the two American soap operas offer consumer spectacles that place them in



Dyer's category of abundance and in his light entertainment aesthetic, the British soap operas, argues Geraghty, have a greater commitment to the realist construction and ideology of community (Geraghty, 1991: 125). Though lacking *Dallas* and *Dynasty*'s excessive and overt materialism, *Home and Away* and *Neighbours*, as I have noted, fit well into Dyer's category of abundance. And, while the two programmes do not possess the British soaps' naturalistic inheritance and appeal to community, they nonetheless work hard to construct and unite fictional neighbourhoods. I would argue, then, that in various ways *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* work to affect a utopian world more fully than any of the five texts Geraghty analyses, and meet her generic capacity in their own rights.

However, in keeping with an understanding of the worlds created by the texts as liminal zones, if *Ramsay Street* and especially *Summer Bay* are idyllic playgrounds, they are also gaols:

"Australia offers a new beginning not because it is a kind of paradise, but, on the contrary, because it is purgatorial, the place of the ordeal which reveals the possibilities which may emerge from the pain and the mastery which may emerge from submission." (Brady in Turner, 1986: 52).

Graeme Turner notes that the idea of Australia as a place of purgation occurs more or less explicitly across popular texts (Turner, 1986: 50-52). He links this to the country's historical status as "Her Majesty's gaolyard", noting that the metaphor of the prison recurs across Australian fiction (ibid., p.51). For various reasons, this is I think a useful way in which to conceive of *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*.

Ramsay Street and Summer Bay are where characters come to be reformed. In Narrative 2, Episode 1, *Neighbours*, with the help of Dorothy, Lou is in the process of being reformed. In later episodes, as I have noted, Jack will be reformed with the help, especially but not only, of Gaby. Russell will be reformed and rehabilitated with the help of his initial victim, Phoebe. And in Episode 3, Michael's return from a detention centre is imminent - and his reintegration, this time, is to be successful. In *Home and Away*, it is especially young characters which arrive in obvious need of training and reformation. Of the characters current to the programme in the narratives I have examined Blake, Sophie, Damien, Shane, Tug, Angel and Fin all came to Summer Bay in previous episodes from 'difficult' backgrounds (with the exception of Tug who lives on the edge of town/in the sticks with his ne'r-do-well father). Most of these characters became foster children. All were non-conformist in their own ways. All became (with hindsight) sensitive, good souls before leaving the bay for a brighter future (with the exception of Shane, who having matured to accept the responsibilities of work, marriage and fatherhood tragically died). Summer Bay in this respect presents itself as a rural retreat for the indigent, orphaned and emotionally damaged. By Turner we are reminded that in the post-WWII period over 130 000 orphaned, deprived or 'difficult' children were dispatched from Britain to Australia to become the servants of Christian missions or wealthy families - a statistic still repressed in official British discourses. The texts' communities in this sense are as much about reformation and surveillance as they are about utopia and leisure.

The endless stream and narrative imperative of therapeutic help and advice frequently closes in on characters in the two programmes. Often this is because a particular character

is unwilling or unable to wake up to his/her own problem. This is true of Fin in Episode 2 and Michael in Episode 3 of *Home and Away*. It is also the case regarding Gaby in the seventh scene (scene 16) of Narrative 1, Episode 3, *Neighbours*. Lauren advises Gaby that Jack may not be as serious about their (Gaby and Jack's) relationship as she is. Lauren is trying to inform Gaby as sensitively as possible of what she and we already know: that Jack has stood up Gaby in favour of Cheryl, and earlier asked Lauren out on a date. When Gaby won't take the hint, Lauren tells her this. Gaby still will not believe Lauren and wheels on her. She insists that Lauren is jealous and wants Jack for herself. Lauren's sexual reputation within the Ramsay Street community, Gaby spits, makes this all the more likely.

At other times the community's government and characters' advice are unwelcome because of their more dubious status. I have already referred to the unwelcomeness of Alf's advice in Episode 1 of *Home and Away*. And, earlier on in the same episode (3) of *Neighbours* Lauren advises Cheryl that she is too old to be flirting with Jack. With barbs, Cheryl responds that she is sick of Lauren and her father's (Lou) regulation of her behaviour. In front of Lauren out of spite, Cheryl invites Jack to dinner that evening. In a privileged narrative position, viewers know that Cheryl is toying with Jack who, she knows, only seeks Cheryl's investment in his business. We also know that Lauren's judgement is partly guided by her desire to protect her father, Lou, who still has feelings for Cheryl.

Thus, to this extent, the worlds of *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* suffocate their characters. Their trials become too harsh, too, when characters seem torn by the paradoxical imperatives of the problem page - be true to yourself,



transform yourself. This to a degree is what happens to Sally when she gives free reign to her sexual desires in Episode 2 of *Home and Away*. Michael's advice is that there is nothing wrong with expressing true love, but Sally must learn how to do this in the right way in the right context. In a narrative that is familiar to both programmes, Tug and Beth learn this lesson more harshly in Narrative 1 of Episode 3, *Home and Away*. Their true love is deemed illicit by the Summer Bay community because of an age difference (which the texts always eventually forgive); but it is worse (unforgivable) that Tug is Beth's pupil. And, when Brad and Beth find true love/their true selves in Narrative 2 of Episode 3, *Neighbours*, they are unsure whether it is because of or despite the Ramsay Street community's help and advice. Mark has just played cupid by taking Brad to Beth's hideout, from where she was about to leave Ramsay Street and Brad for a building job in the city. In the couple's concluding romantic clinch and negotiation, Brad says that he might have been better able to communicate his true love for Beth if he had not been so confused by a plethora of well-meaning advice: "If everyone had left us alone back then we might have got back together."

These are some of the ways, then, in which the worlds created by the texts, by their own, explicit terms, are repressive as well as ideal. Graeme Turner's concepts of prison and of purgatory - where the mastery of oneself must emerge from the submission to specific types of regime - seem quite applicable here. In later sections we will consider the particular nature, genesis and consequences of such regimes of government. In the final part of this analysis of the texts, though, I would like to examine some of the characteristic invitations made by the programmes to viewers.

### 3. Textual invitations

#### (i) *Clues and cues*

All soap operas offer their viewers a profusion of narrative or hermeneutic cues. This is one of the ways in which the genre is characterized. The range and complexity of soap opera's interpretive and speculative cues is one way in which a number of critics have theorized viewers' engagement with the genre, and accounted for the pleasures it offers (see for example Allen, 1985: chapter 4 and Buckingham, 1987: chapter 2). Undoubtedly the same is true for *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*. My interviews show that viewers enjoy being able to explain relationships, predict events, and bring to the texts a wealth of general and programme-specific narrative and generic knowledge. I want to argue, though, that hermeneutic interpretation and narrative prediction are less important to the ways with which *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* are characteristically engaged. And in this section of analysis I will use the texts' tendencies and invitations to support this argument.

Earlier I argued that the two programmes are narratively simple in generic terms. This is one reason why interpretive and speculative reading activity, with regard to the texts' *stories*, is bound to be lower or less complicated than is the case for other soap operas. The programmes' relatively autonomous and stripped narratives, and quite small casts in soap opera terms, mean that the 'reservoir of relational possibilities' (Allen, 1985) is quite shallow in *Home and*

*Away* and *Neighbours*. I have also shown that narrative questions are answered rapidly in both texts. Viewers are not kept waiting in a state of mutual agony, anticipation or powerlessness - the way in which soap opera, following melodrama, reading has been theorized. Indeed and despite how quickly narrative questions are answered, *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* frequently leave little room for narrative speculation. The texts seem to enjoy affording their viewers a relatively consistent position of narrative mastery.

I referred earlier to a scene from Episode 1 of *Neighbours* which I think illustrates this well (the fourth scene of the *Lou and Madge* narrative, where Dorothy visits Madge's living room/kitchen and viewers are offered a number of transparent narrative cues). The two opening scenes of another of the programme's episodes exhibit this tendency to excess. Episode 3 of *Neighbours* opens with the *Brad and Beth* narrative. Brad remonstrates with Mark for not having told him where Beth is hiding out. (Romantically confused, Beth is at a coastal retreat collecting her thoughts. In the last episode she decided that she would go from there to the city to start a new life.) When Brad lunges at Mark he pushes him off - mate or not, he promised Beth that he would keep her location secret. Brad breaks down and confesses to Mark that he loves Beth and doesn't want to lose her. Impelled by his friend's distress and in an excessively pointed manner, Mark tells Brad that he will be leaving to visit Beth "in half an hour". The exchange of looks between the two characters is comic, and is lent further pantomime status by the held close-up of Brad's face and accompanying melodramatic music at the conclusion of the scene. Viewers can be in no doubt that Brad is to follow Mark. Their familiarity with the narratives' simplicity and speed means that they might



speculate that in the next scene of this narrative they will see Brad making his greatest effort to secure the love of Beth.

In fact, the text seems not to want to let go of the viewer's hand. In the following segment of this narrative (scene 3 of the episode - "half an hour" later) what we already know is confirmed in a narratively superfluous but comic fashion. In a silent (dastardly, comic pantomime) thirty second scene, Mark puts a case in the boot of his car. On the opposite side of the street in his car, Brad looks determined. Mark starts his car, and before leaving nods meaningfully to Brad - which by this point is more a cue for ironic laughter than a narrative pointer. Brad makes a generous u-turn, and, transparently, excessively a man-with-a-mission, pursues Mark.

Clearly, the text gives viewers little narrative work to do in these scenes. Further, the larger narrative question - will Brad and Beth get it together properly this time? - is not only answered conclusively two scenes later in this narrative (scene 9 of Episode 3), but presents no mystery for a large number of *Neighbours*' viewers. Typically, that Brad and Beth will marry and leave Ramsay Street/the serial has been revealed days and weeks in advance by a host of related (television and women and teenage-targeted) magazines.

Importantly, these two comic scenes from the *Brad and Beth* narrative do not mean that *Neighbours* does not take the two characters' romance/romance generally/Brad's emotional state seriously. Rather, they indicate both texts' lesser (only) aspiration to the melodramatic or social realism privileged by some other soap operas. Ien Ang's analysis of *Dallas*

gives emphasis to its melodramatic or emotional realism and, especially, women viewers' capacity to engage with this (Ang, 1985). One of the reasons why Ang's general theory cannot be applied to *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* is, as I have noted, that these texts' narrative form does not leave viewers (or characters) powerless and waiting. Part of Ang's theory is based on the notion that melodramatic affect can transcend realist narrative form - that effect outstrips cause in realist terms (which is how Steve Neale describes the theory which Ang applies to *Dallas* - Neale, 1986). Ang acknowledges that this affective regime may be engaged with by viewers in quite different ways to the ones in which she takes the greatest interest - for example and especially in a humorous or ironic way (Ang, 1985: 82, and see too Ang, 1988). Following Mark Finch, this may be when, in programmes like *Dallas* and *Dynasty*, scene-concluding gestures are "in excess of the non-naturalistic performance melodrama demands." (Finch, 1986: 40). At times, argues Finch, *Dynasty* seems to point ironically to its own conventions. Extra-diegetic music, for example, is sometimes so transparent that viewers hardly require images to accompany it (ibid.). This capacity to go beyond the aesthetic requirements of not only naturalism but melodrama is frequently exhibited by *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* - and more so than is the case in other soap operas, including *Dallas* and *Dynasty*. This is one of the reasons why the two scenes from the *Brad and Beth* narrative, above, are so comic. Scene-concluding moments are the most obvious indicators of what I have already noted is a tendency which seems to pay little respect to the substance of a particular narrative.

This said, there are times in both programmes when the invitation to a comic or pantomime sensibility is especially open. The opening scene of Narrative 1, Episode 1, *Home and Away* closes with a close-up of Les' face which seems derived directly from staged pantomime-melodrama and silent cinema. Like pantomime, the shot is held and privileged for viewers, who are invited to recognise and laugh at Les' dastardly status (which is not to say, as I noted earlier, that he will not in later episodes transform into/find his better self). In the last segment (scene 18 of the episode) of Narrative 2, Episode 3, *Home and Away*, viewers are again placed in such a privileged position narratively that they can enjoy the full pantomime/boys' own comic affect of the scene, and narrative. Jack believes that Angel is wooing him with love letters and wants him to come to her bedroom that night. Viewers know that the letter was sent by Shane, Angel's boyfriend. Shane has been scheming in, for viewers, a highly transparent fashion, to get Jack into trouble. Jack enters Alf's corner shop. He cannot decide on which aftershave to spend the \$15 he has borrowed. In a typically and excessively broad sketch of Australianness and masculinity, Alf advises him that one will keep flies at bay, the other will "attract sheilas from miles around" - but he cannot remember which is which. Jack chooses one, and as he is leaving he bumps into Shane who enters the shop with Angel. Shane glares at Jack. Alf tells them what Jack bought, and he and Angel speculate on who is the lucky girl. The scene and episode end with a privileged close-up of Shane's knowing, grinning face - accompanied by low key, melodramatic piano which heightens the pantomime affect and invitation.



An ironic sensibility attaches itself again to Shane in the last example of this type of invitation which I would like to consider. The last scene of Narrative 3, Episode 2, *Home and Away* is also the last scene (16) of the episode. Shane's older brother and guardian, Nick, wants to take him on a kayaking trip. Nick wants to get closer to Shane, help him grow, and is motivated by a training course he recently completed (Nick is a policeman). To Shane, the idea of the trip and bonding with Nick is repugnant. He discusses his feelings with Damien in scene 16, where the boys play pool in the surf club. Damien asks Shane if he has asked Nick if he can have a motorbike yet. Shane says that Nick does not know about his wishes for one yet, and that he is not hopeful regarding his brother's response - unless... A scheme occurs to Shane, a wicked grin flashing across his face. "Unless, he says, I start playing the game". Shane says that he has changed his mind, he will go on the kayaking trip. As he makes the decision, his arch, grinning face is held in close-up. Instead of melodramatic, the shot is accompanied by, and the episode ends with, a loud burst of rococo cha-cha music, and the words Bad Boy! are shouted, extra-diegetically, over Shane's face.

Clearly, viewers are invited to engage with an ironic and more comic strip than pantomime sensibility here. Shane and Damien are made thoroughly undangerous teenage rebels in this scene - quite typical to the general parts they played in *Home and Away* at this stage in their self-growth. That the scene features teenage characters and occurs in the surf club (conspicuous consumption, body-building gym and coffee bar, endless stream of young, honed bodies) is important. It communicates the sense of energy and utopia theorized by Richard Dyer (1981) to which I made reference earlier. The appeal to viewers in this scene, and frequently in the

texts, is simultaneously to an ironic and utopian sensibility. This indicates both that the texts appeal less to the sense of tragedy theorized of soap opera by Ang (1985) and others (see for example Modleski, 1982), and that they consistently make multiple invitations to their viewers.

In his analysis of contemporary television, John Caughie argues that the medium frequently appeals to an ironic imagination where dissociation and engagement occur simultaneously, two or more conditions are negotiated at once (Caughie, 1990: 53). This sense of irony, Caughie suggests, is variously originated. It results from television's general and specific forms, as well as from its characteristic context of reception. It is also part of a shared historical consciousness which viewers bring to programmes. In later sections we will consider what history has brought to viewers' engagements with *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*. Here, though, I am interested in the notion of multiple points of engagement which Caughie rightly indicates is applicable to much of contemporary television. It is this idea rather than the theory that soap opera offers its viewers the opportunity to identify with a variety of characters which I think is most useful for an analysis of *Home and Away* and *Neighbours*.

(ii) *What kind of a person?*

*Home and Away* and *Neighbours* both make a number of invitations to their viewers which are frequently simultaneous. They invite their viewers to enjoy feeling masterful in the frequent ease with which they can piece together the texts' narratives. They also appeal to ironic and utopian imaginations. The two programmes also ask their

viewers to recognise various aesthetic and generic conventions. Part of this process is the recognition of familiar character types. Frequently, *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* seem to ask their viewers, What type of a person is this? According to Charlotte Brunsdon, this is an invitation characteristically made by soap opera (Brunsdon, 1981: 36). I want to argue, though, that as well as occurring at more than one level in *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*, this is a question that is more consistent and more central to these programmes than is the case in other soap operas.

Brunsdon argues that the question, What kind of a person is this?, is asked of all soap operas' characters; and, that it is in fact the question that provides the basis for more ostensible narrative-hermeneutic cues - the What will happen next? of soap opera (ibid.). This is true, but in a sense more true of *Home and Away* and *Neighbours*. Frequently in the two programmes, it is not only the case that the former question supersedes the latter, but that it is impossible to distinguish between the two. In the twenty narratives I have examined, the question frequently asked at the conclusion of scenes and episodes is What will he/she do?, which in the narrative and discursive regimes of both texts is inseparable from What type of a person is he/she? I would argue that this is another of the important invitations made to viewers at the finish of Episode 2, *Home and Away*, which I have just discussed in the context of irony and utopia - Shane's grinning face and "Unless I start playing the game"... There is an especially good example of this type of invitation - where What will...? and What type...? are asked simultaneously - at the conclusion of Episode 2, *Neighbours*.



In the final scene of Narrative 1, *Philip and Julie*, Julie receives a telephone call from Sydney. The call is for Philip who is taking a shower. As I noted earlier, in this narrative Philip is trying to locate his 'troubled' son, Michael. He didn't tell Julie about his search because in previous episodes Julie was terrorized by Michael, her stepson. Julie believed that she and Philip had agreed that Michael would never be allowed to enter their home again. In the scene that preceded this one, however, Philip admitted, to Julie's horror, that he is committed to finding Michael, and cannot promise that he would not allow him back into the Martin household. The telephone call is from a shelter where Michael is staying. Because of his detective work, the shelter knows that Philip is trying to locate his son. The caller advises Julie that Philip should fly to Sydney immediately, as she does not know how long Michael will stay. As Julie puts the telephone down, Philip appears from the shower. When he asks who called, flustered, Julie replies a mother of one of the children at Hannah's birthday party that afternoon to say thank you. The scene and episode close with a close-up of Julie's torn face and melodramatic music. The signs point to her duplicity and to her dilemma. Regular viewers know the basis and extent of Julie's fear of Michael. They also know that having moments/scenes ago secured a strong moral position in her relationship with Philip and in her role as a parent, Julie is now, suddenly ethically tarnished. (In the preceding scene to this one Julie apologized for but justified her extravagant party-throwing action by telling Philip that he had learned the lesson of honesty and open communication between parents and husband and wife.) Characteristic to the texts, Julie's self has transformed rapidly, and is now placed in a specific narrative and ethical dilemma: What will Julie

do?/What kind of a person is Julie? Again characteristically, the question is answered quickly, in the next episode.

This type of invitation attaches itself variously and consistently to all characters in *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*. With new or temporary characters the question, What kind of a person is this?, frequently initially stands alone, relatively devoid of a What will he/she do? combination. This was the case when the temporary Jack, Russell (*Neighbours*) and Les (*Home and Away*) were introduced to the texts - all of whom were shown to be in need of help and were rapidly reformed and dispatched by the texts. And there is a good and acute example of this tendency in Narrative 3 of Episode 1, *Neighbours*.

This narrative is apparently about romance - a blind date between Jim Robinson and a new character, Jill Weir. However, although I have called the narrative *Jim and Jill*, any romance between these characters is not so much ostensible as non-existent. In the five scenes given to this narrative in Episode 1, it quickly becomes evident that the important question is What kind of a person is Jill Weir? In the third and fourth scenes of the narrative (scenes 8 and 11), the text invites us to ask What is wrong with Jill Weir? In the fifth scene (14), that question is answered and we are better able to judge what kind of a person Jill Weir is. I have already referred to scene eleven of this episode of *Neighbours* under generic style. It is where, in a highly staged, melodramatic fashion, Jill storms off from the lunch table, believing that her ability as a mother has been questioned. This begins to confirm that it is Jill's lack of belief in her parenting ability that is part of her 'problem'. Characteristically, the preceding scene's (8)

question, What is wrong with Jill?, who in this scene is made transparently nervous and uptight (even by the expectations of a blind date), is answered quickly. In the final scene (14) of the narrative in this episode, in a major purge, Jill apologizes to her hosts (Pam and Doug - Jim and the romance narrative now conspicuously absent) and details the familial problems she is experiencing and which have led her to doubt her mothering skills (she has separated from her husband; Jill works, and her mother-in-law helps to look after her son; the mother-in-law spends much of her guardianship time trying to alienate the son from his mother, persuading him Jill is to blame for the break up et cetera).

### (iii) *Hierarchy of skills*

In the opening two of the five scenes given to the *Jim and Jill* narrative, viewers are given strong hints that the potential romance is never to be. This is because the romance/Jim and Jill's meeting is organised by Doug Willis. Like so many of both texts' characters, as I have indicated, Doug is sketched in broad strokes. Typically, in the opening two scenes (scenes 2 and 5 of Episode 1, *Neighbours*), Doug is shown to be insensitive and unskilled in his ability as a relationship manager. The text signals this in the way in which Doug conducts himself (cavalier, bullish to the point of comedy), and in the transparent contrast - visually and through dialogue - made between Doug and Pam in these scenes. Pam warns Doug that his cupid moves and the manner in which he makes them may be unwelcome. Viewers, typically, are given privileged shots of Pam's resigned, knowing, portentous face. As Charlotte Brunsdon has argued, viewers draw here on specific types of cultural knowledge (Brunsdon,



1981: 36). They know that Doug manages the Jim and Jill negotiation badly, and complicit in that cultural knowledge the text flatters them with signs which transparently confirm it. Simultaneously, viewers of *Neighbours* draw here on one of Brunsdon's other categories of soap opera engagement or competency - serial-specific knowledge (ibid.). They know that the Jim-Jill romance is probably doomed because Doug arranges it and Pam thinks it is misguided. Relatively consistently, Pam is more skilled in the management of intimate relationships, and of herself. And on this occasion her feeling that a meeting was organised badly and too hastily seems to be proved right.

As I have indicated at various points above, *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* do "pose a potential moral equality of all individuals" (Brunsdon, 1981: 36). And, as Brunsdon argues of soap opera, one of the ways in which they do this is by repeatedly asking of all characters, What kind of a person is this? (ibid.). As I have also already argued, though, both programmes do establish relatively stable, but by no means fixed hierarchies. They are hierarchies of expertise - expertise in the interpretation and management of particular ethical scenarios; expertise in the management of intimate relations and self. In her analysis of *Crossroads*, Brunsdon argues that the genre invites viewers to draw upon their cultural knowledge of how to manage the personal sphere. Peculiarly feminine competencies or skills are called upon. Like other critics, Brunsdon links this theory to one regarding the genre's narrative structure: "*Crossroads* textually implies a feminine viewer to the extent that its textual discontinuities require a viewer competent within the ideological and moral frameworks, the rules, of romance, marriage and family life to make sense of it." (Brunsdon, 1981: 37).

At the level of characterisation, *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* do, to some extent, meet Brunsdon's notion of feminine expertise. As I have noted, in the *Jim and Jill* narrative it is not unusual that viewers are invited to recognise Pam's relationship skills and Doug's lack of them - and that Pam is highly feminized to Doug's blunt masculinity. There are other clear examples of this type of feminine/masculine divide in both programmes. I have already referred to Narrative 2 of Episode 1, *Home and Away*, where Ailsa and Bobby are shown to be better managers of themselves and intimate relations than Alf and Greg. I have also noted that in Narrative 1 of this episode Ailsa is the key intermediary and best manager of relationships in the negotiations between Blake and his foster and biological fathers (and between Blake and his best mate, Adam). These are particular episodes where the skills of female characters, and by Brunsdon's terms femininity, are privileged. They are by no means unusual to *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*, but neither are they textual discontinuities. As I have already argued, the types of skill Brunsdon theorizes are not practised by certain characters only and invited of viewers at key moments in the two programmes. They are central and consistent to the texts' narrative and discursive regimes. Because of this, for *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* I think that rather than the feminine/masculine dichotomy which Brunsdon's analysis suggests, the notion of a stable but shifting hierarchy of skills is more useful. Female characters may occupy more of the upper reaches of this hierarchy in the two texts, but as I have indicated they are joined by some male characters and are by no means guaranteed a timeless occupancy. Further, the examples of feminine/masculine divides to which I have just pointed seem to revel in highlighting them. They feature Doug and Alf who

consistently occupy the lower reaches of *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*'s hierarchies of expertise, and are masculine to the point of parody. Viewers of these episodes are asked to draw on what the texts suggest are common skills, competencies so familiar as to put into question Brunsdon's notion of special, feminine skills.

(iv) *Three invitations*

I want to finish this section of analysis by considering three narrative scenarios which indicate how viewers are invited to enter into *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*'s hierarchy of skills; how they are invited to test their skills and feel expert in the practice of them. In Narrative 2 of Episode 3, *Home and Away*, viewers can take pleasure in being more knowing than Summer Bay's primary expert, Pippa. The first two scenes of this narrative (1 and 3) feature characteristic confessions and advice. Jack receives a love letter which he believes is from Angel. He wants to pursue the letter's sentiments/Angel, but has to confirm first that it really is from her. In scene 1, in the first step toward doing this, he asks Pippa if it is normal practice for girls to send boys love letters. Pippa says yes, certainly. In the next scene (3), the conversation continues and Jack musters more confessional confidence. He asks Pippa if girls ever lead boys on. Pippa says that some do. Rhetorically, Jack says/asks, Not the nice ones? Pippa then exhibits the depth of her wisdom and expertise. Without committing herself, she responds, Depends. The text/Pippa, I would argue, is saying here: An expert adviser needs more information than this, and is not about to shut the door on a range of modes of female conduct. I have a sophisticated knowledge and broad range of ethical expertise and require the specifics of this



scenario before I can properly advise you. Jack responds to Pippa's Depends with, Oh. He is frustrated, needs more advice/information, doesn't like the possibility that even nice girls like Angel might lead boys/him on, isn't ready to confess more at this point. Expert that she is, Pippa senses this and draws Jack out: She must be very special, says Pippa. This prompts Jack to lose his objective, testing mode, and he blurts out that he is mad about a girl, still concealing that the girl is Angel. The scene ends with advice and an invitation from Pippa - there's no harm in having some fun, but don't get too serious and break her heart, Jack; remember you're leaving the Bay soon; bring her round for dinner - and a close-up of Jack's grinning face. He has chosen to hear that even Pippa has advised him to have some fun.

Viewers feel superior to Pippa at this point. Her advice, as usual and by the terms of the text, is good. It is, though, misguided and unwittingly fuels trouble because Pippa lacks Jack and viewers' knowledge. She gives Jack the agony aunt's 'go for it' signals he sought, without knowing that it is Shane's girlfriend Angel in whom he is interested. Jack's excitement is generated not only by the prospect of securing Angel's affection, but by the possibility of stealing his greatest enemy's girlfriend. Jack, viewers know, is being fooled by Shane and is doomed. Pippa eases the progress of Shane's boyish scheme - even giving Jack money she cannot afford for aftershave in the following scene. At this stage in the narrative, viewers can take pleasure in recognizing the text's comic-pantomime sensibility. They laugh and enjoy their position of narrative mastery. They can also feel expert in knowing that advice may be good in principle, but - as the programme indicates here - is only effective and proved to be ethically good when it is aimed at and

knows the specifics of a particular, mundane scenario. If they are especially familiar and expert with the text's regime, they can take superior pleasure in knowing that both Shane and Jack will soon be punished for their emotional immaturity/failure to manage themselves and their relationships well.

Narrative 3 of Episode 3, *Neighbours*, is more complicated and difficult for viewers to predict. They are again, though, invited to practise their relationship and self-management skills and are offered a relatively superior position to the narrative's characters in doing so. In the third and last scene of this narrative (scene 12) in Episode 3, Philip and his daughter Debbie arrive home from a game of basketball. They are in high spirits and their familial closeness is highlighted visually and through dialogue. This is in transparent opposition to Julie (Philip's wife, Debbie's mother), who greets them. Julie is nervous about the imminent arrival of her stepson, Michael. He is returning from a youth detention centre, and part of the reason he has been detained is the breakdown of his relationship with his stepmother. Julie feels alienated from Philip and from the family. The three characters and regular viewers know that Julie is generally volatile, and that she has never succeeded in establishing a good relationship with Michael. On his homecoming, it is as likely that she will open wounds as heal them. Julie is desperate to 'make things work', and feels that she is on trial. We know this because of the conversation Julie had with Lou, a friend, in the preceding scene. She confessed her anxieties and desires to Lou, who advised her to do something practical to illustrate her genuine commitment to Michael and the family. Characteristically in narrative terms, Julie is acting on this advice in this following scene. She has put her

daughter Hannah's possessions into Michael's bedroom. Hannah's bedroom is bigger, and Julie is going to decorate it and give it to Michael on his arrival. Philip is delighted at Julie's show of welcome and concern for Michael. Debbie has serious doubts. She thinks that Julie is being insensitive to Hannah's feelings (Hannah has not been consulted). She is also suspicious of Julie's motives. The switch of bedrooms could be as unsettling for Michael as it is welcoming. She remains to be persuaded that Julie really does want to welcome Michael back into the family. The scene ends with a close-up of Debbie's worried and doubting face.

Viewers are invited to speculate on events in the next scene in this narrative (Michael's arrival in the following episode). They are also asked to make a judgement on Julie's action and Debbie's scepticism. *Neighbours* generally affords Debbie a higher position than Julie in its hierarchy of self and relationship skills - Debbie is still, importantly, going through the trials of youth, but Julie is a notoriously poor manager. Unlike Debbie, though, viewers possess the knowledge of the preceding scene. They know that on this occasion Julie really is making a genuine effort to welcome Michael. They can be persuaded by the authenticity of Julie's action, but this does not mean that they believe it to be the right or best move in this particular scenario. Julie's motives are ethically sound, and in this respect viewers know that Debbie's scepticism (on this occasion) is unwarranted.

Her doubts, though, about the specific nature of Julie's gesture may be justified. Transformed morally or ethically in her desire to meet/relate to her stepson, Julie still lacks skills in the management of intimacy. Viewers are invited to and ask themselves a number of questions: What



should Julie do?; What would I do in Julie's position?; What type of a person is Julie?; What type of a person is Debbie?; What type of a person is Hannah?; What type of a person is Michael? (the latter two being, simultaneously, How will Hannah/Michael respond?). As well as particular characters and their judgements and actions, viewers are invited to engage with, judge and practise their skills upon the specifics of a particular, mundane scenario. Viewers can place themselves at the top of the skills hierarchy if they have speculated that Julie and Michael have both transformed and are ready to work on their relationship (the bedroom gesture is welcomed by Michael); but that Julie's new problem is Hannah, who as a result of Julie's action now feels alienated from her mother and hostile to her stepbrother. Lacking our knowledge, Debbie was half right. Lacking our skills, Julie was partially successful.

The last scenario I want to examine again asks viewers to consider how skilful particular characters are in the way in which they manage themselves and their intimate relations. It also, like the Pippa-Jack scenes we considered above (Narrative 3 of Episode 3, *Home and Away*), mixes serious advice and comic pantomime. In the third scene of Narrative 3, Episode 2, *Home and Away* (scene 5 of the episode), Nick and Donald discuss Shane's welfare. They are in the kitchen of Donald's house. Nick is a policeman and Shane's brother and guardian. Donald is Summer Bay's headteacher and helps Nick in the guardianship of Shane. The three men (Shane is in his mid-teens) live in Donald's house. Nick has just completed a police training course during which he worked with homeless young people. He is enthused by the course. He tells Donald that he intends to put some of what he has learned into practice in his guardianship of/relationship with Shane. Shane has been neglected by Nick and Shane's

parents, which is why he has come to live with his older brother in Summer Bay. Nick says that he now understands Shane's bad behaviour as a cry for help. He lacks self-worth and needs the care on which he has missed out. Donald tempers Nick's enthusiasm and tells him that Shane is not in the same category as the people with whom he has just worked. He advises Nick that he would be unwise to use Shane as a test case. In any case, says Donald, in Nick's absence Shane has been behaving well. In a transparently and quite typically comic gesture, this assurance has barely left Donald's lips when Shane enters the house and kitchen: fresh from a fight, foolish grin, shirt torn, Damien as his embarrassed, gauche teenage sidekick.

As was the case with Julie, above, viewers are asked to recognise in this scene that Nick's intentions are sound, but that his methods are unskilled, naive. What kind of a person is this?: Generally, Nick is not as low in the hierarchy of self and relationship skills as Julie, but neither does he know its heights. Archetypically, Julie is burdened with being melodrama's hysterical mother and soap opera's interfering neighbour. Nick, regular viewers know, consistently tries to turn himself into modern man, sensitive to his sense of himself and the needs of others. He is, though, a slow learner, and it is a long and painful process. Characteristically in this scene he is trying too hard. Like Donald, too, he finds it difficult to relinquish what he best understands - order, rules, discipline. Repeatedly in the text, when relationships get too complicated, both characters reach desperately and usually very clumsily for some sense of authority. Sitting at neither the top nor the bottom of the skills hierarchy, the

characters of Nick and Donald frequently figure the text's basic and broader tensions - the battle between asceticism and hedonism, old and new masculinities.

Donald rises above Nick in the hierarchy in this scene. As well as being a headteacher and a champion of traditional education, he knows some of the text's most important modern, liberal lessons and wants to pass them on to Nick: the best lessons come from life and the immediacy of the everyday, and are learned to the greatest extent possible by oneself; like each life-lesson and scenario, every individual has special needs, requires special treatment. Regular viewers will recognise the superior status of Donald's advice in this scene, and that in the first instance it will go unheeded. Nick's plan will be enacted and is doomed. Viewers know both that Nick is relatively unskilled and a slow learner, and that Shane, transparently, is at an immature stage in his self-growth (What kind of a person is Shane?). Characteristically, this latter point is confirmed at the conclusion of this scene, and in the scheming-Shane scene which closes the episode (to which I have already made reference - scene 16, where Shane and Damien play pool and Shane decides, for his scheming reasons, to go kayaking with Nick).

## **Conclusions**

This analysis details what I think are the important, basic features of *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*. It shows what they share and how they depart from other soap operas - and from the analysis of other soap operas. It also points to what may be the characteristic ways with which the programmes are engaged. Not surprisingly, following my review of the



textual analyses of soap opera, the two programmes combine new ideas and representations with residual ones, offer their viewers multiple points of engagement, and mix popular archetypes and generic styles. As I have argued, both programmes transparently depend upon but also highlight and question familiar dichotomies. They are also frequently simultaneously comic and serious in their intentions. As well as their knowingness, transparency and multiplicity, though, my analysis also points to the programmes' quite coherent cultural projects. Prior to and in anticipation of my audience study and of a broader theoretical and historical analysis, I will now summarize what I think are the programmes' special features.

I have argued and illustrated that the texts' narratives are simple, undramatic and transparent, and that *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* are at least less dependent on a social-realist or naturalist aesthetic than other soap operas. This, I think, is important. It means that viewers are asked to attend to other characteristic features and structures. In particular, they are invited to consider how well characters manage themselves and their intimate relationships, and the specifics of the dilemmas posed in the texts' mundane scenarios. Frequently, as we have seen, viewers are simultaneously invited to ask: What kind of person is this?; What will he/she do?; What should he/she do?; What would I do? While other soap operas make similar invitations to their viewers, my analysis shows that they are central to *Home and Away* and *Neighbours*. It is not only that they take precedence over other narrative questions; predominantly they are the programmes' narrative questions. The rapid speed of narrative/character action and character transformation is an indicator of this tendency.

Particular articulations of community and family of course play important parts in the two programmes' narratives. Not disconnected from this, though, and more, I think, than is the case in any other soap operas broadcast on British terrestrial television, the transformative, malleable and relatively autonomous self is the narrative point of axis in *Home and Away* and *Neighbours*. In this respect it is important that while all the two programmes' characters are special in their own ways - and frequently recognizable as the types of soap opera and popular culture - they are also all the same. With the exception of new arrivals and as I have argued to varying degrees, they are all skilled intermediaries. They are also, though, all still trainees. All issue effective advice; all are able to repair themselves. All repeatedly make the same mistakes in their intimate relationships; all must continually work upon a self that is never finished, foolproof. The programmes in this respect consistently appeal to and reproduce a particular type of expertise or competency which is not just the preserve of female characters or viewers. My analysis of *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* indicates that a notion of feminine competency begins to explain the texts' discursive regimes, but that we must go beyond it for a fuller understanding.

To understand what is typical to *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* requires a more fully articulated notion of cultural practice. Viewers of the two programmes, as has generally been argued of soap opera and melodrama, are afforded the possibility to be highly active. This activity may include narrative construction, emotional involvement and the recognition of the typical structures of soap opera and gendered behaviour, but it goes, and is allowed to go beyond this. Beyond identification and as well as

recognition, viewers make judgements and are invited to use the programmes. The texts in this sense, as Jane Feuer suggests, are facilitators (Feuer, 1989: 458), viewers' engagements with them a form of cultural practice. And as I have argued, viewers of *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* are encouraged to feel that they are more skilful practitioners than even the most able of the programmes' relationship managers. They are allowed not only to make the same judgements of characters as characters make of each other (Brunsdon, 1981: 37); rather, in a privileged position, viewers are usually provided with all the details of a particular scenario and can evaluate the astuteness of characters' moves and advise them on what they should have done. In the terms of the programmes, the referent for the 'should' here seems to be nothing other than the scenario itself.

As I noted earlier, Brunsdon also argues that *Crossroads*' project is to construct a moral consensus about the conduct of personal life (ibid., p.35). In *Home and Away* and *Neighbours*, though, just as the will to self-transformation frequently seems to come from nowhere but within, so is it difficult to identify a moral consensus into which viewers are invited to enter. Viewers seem to be asked to employ what are at once more complicated, specific and mundane knowledges and skills than is suggested by the broad notion of a moral consensus. As my analysis suggests, once a narrative has run its course there are very few villains as such in *Home and Away* and *Neighbours*. To say that a character is bad in the texts is to say that he/she is naive, unskilled in the management of her/himself. In the examples I provide in the latter parts of my analysis,



Julie, Nick and Jack have conducted themselves badly because they lack knowledge and skills - in the texts' terms, everyday life skills.

Brunsdon argues that such skills - in her terms feminine skills - are drawn from cultural repertoires, "elaborated elsewhere, already in circulation and brought to the programme by the viewer" (Brunsdon, 1981: 37), and this, I think, is more productive than the notion of a moral consensus. As well as to peculiarly gendered learning and behaviour, it points us to history, to other cultural forms, to a broad matrix of training and power. I want to finish this chapter with a consideration of some recent and older forms which are close in their structures, invitations and projects to *Home and Away* and *Neighbours*; and as such are part of the repertoire, directly and indirectly, on which the programmes and their viewers draw.

In chapter 2, I argued that analysts of soap opera had reached too hastily for established theoretical models. Prominent among these, I suggested, were structuralist and anti-realist theories of film. In suggesting a new way in which we might theorize Hollywood film, Noel Carroll also notes his dissatisfaction with Screen theory - in particular psychoanalysis (Carroll, 1990). We might do well, Carroll argues, to conceive of some popular films as exercises in emotional learning. The films and their viewers, he suggests, draw on a repertory of "paradigm scenarios", for example love scenarios, relationship scenarios (ibid., pp.56-57). Viewers do not simply learn and copy Hollywood scenarios in a naive or behaviourist sense. Film, rather, is only one way in which we extend and refine our broad, cultural repertoire of scenarios:

"(P)aradigm scenarios will be acquired, and...may be refined over time by the acquisition of further and more complex paradigm scenarios. There will be many sources from which we derive these paradigm scenarios: observation and memory; stories told us on our caretaker's knee; stories told us by friends and school teachers; gossip...and of course newspaper articles, self-help books, TV shows, novels, plays, films and so on." (p.56).

Earlier I made reference to the similarities between *Home and Away* and *Neighbours*' narrative structures and those of problem pages and comic picture strips. Following Carroll, these forms clearly are part of the cultural repertoire, the resource on which *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* and their viewers draw. Two historical studies of the advice column, I think, make this plain. Robin Kent notes that in the late-nineteenth century editors of problem pages sought new strategies for meeting an expanding readership (Kent, 1979: 15ff). Primary among these was a mix of authority, authenticity and intimacy. Increasingly, from the 1850s onward, an authentic voice in British advice columns meant not only professional expertise, but, as importantly, the ability of the 'auntie' to show that he/she had been through the same trials as his/her readers. The degree of intimacy increased still, notes Kent, in the early decades of this century. In the rash of new 'mill-girl' publications following World War I, advisers were no longer matronly mother-friends, but appeared instead as 'chums' (ibid., p.23). This editorial will to democratic participation reached something of a peak in 1927, when 'Mrs Jim' - one of this century's most famous advisers, according to Kent - initiated an experiment in reader participation. Mrs Jim presented to her readers a dilemma where true love's course was threatened by a young woman's lack of assertiveness and an absence of open communication in the relationship in

question. (The young man she loved appeared only to be friendly; an elderly, more than economically secure and 'decent' man had asked her to marry him.) Mrs Jim asked her readers, "What would you do?", and offered 2/6d for the twelve words on a postcard which "best express the opinion of the majority". (Kent, 1979: 25).

This, I think, is a good example of the type of skill *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* ask their characters and invite their viewers to practise; and of the paradigm or ethical scenarios which Carroll begins to theorize. The same discourses and practices are evident in confession magazines - or Family Behavior Magazines, as they were retitled - in America during the same period (Gerbner, 1957). They too mixed 'authentic' advice and popular romance, blurring the boundary between the fantastic and the mundane; and, as Gerbner notes, both aesthetically and generically existed in a tension between the academic and the make-believe (ibid., p.33). Gerbner notes that the editors of the 1920s confession/behaviour magazines advised that the story should be told with the "warm breathlessness of a girl confiding to a friend across the kitchen table"; readers should ask themselves, "I wonder what I'd do in a situation like that?" (p.34). In a form of popular education or government, the magazines' consumers apparently responded to a hidden authority, a judge "neither spiritual nor legal, but (who) seems to operate through the structure of social relations." (Gerbner, 1957: 38).

The final example I want to consider invites a similar practice or mode of imagining and brings us back, as it were, to popular television. Like Noel Carroll, Bernard Sharratt is dissatisfied with dominant structuralist methods of textual analysis. These, he believes, fail to identify



what is special to the ways with which audiences engage with popular entertainments (Sharratt, 1980: 276). Sharratt is interested in the ways in which entertainments engender particular practices of expertise and intimacy. Melodrama, pantomime, football, stand-up comedy, indeed the larger part of popular entertainment, argues Sharratt, shares two characteristic modes of engagement: the audience all believe themselves to be experts in the techniques of the given form; and, they all claim to know and respond to the form's players as if they were personal friends (ibid., p.281).

A curious democracy and fantasy of expertise is established, argues Sharratt. Audience members believe there is no reason why it might not be them scoring the goal, telling the gag, slapping the villain, and as such feel legitimated in their enjoyment and compulsion to pass comment on a performance while it is in progress. Sharratt is sanguine about the Brechtian-participatory possibilities of this practice, believing it to be especially applicable to popular television. The best and most interesting example of its realization, he believes, is the apparently one-off television programme *Your Move*, produced by Granada and broadcast in 1967 (p.288ff).

*Your Move*, says Sharratt, was a cross between a game and a drama. Members of a studio audience were given an imaginary social scenario, assigned roles, but given no script - effectively, they improvised and played-out, orally, a soap opera about a local school's politico-moral trials and machinations. The presenter allowed individual players to make a 'move', but the player could decide who amongst the other players heard his/her move. The presenter, studio audience and viewers were privy to all moves - as was an educational 'expert' who advised the presenter on the

legality of moves, but whose advice was later scrutinised by audience and players. The audience could predict and assess the effectiveness of players/characters' moves, and witness the game/drama's complex and open-ended development; it found itself "thinking both within and above the flow of the game" (Sharratt, 1980: 290).

Sharratt believes *Your Move* to be especially Brechtian in its possibilities because of the way in which players are revealed to be both subjects and objects in the process of government. Institutional roles, he argues, are subverted, and the educational apparatus is represented not as a fixed abstraction, but as a network of interacting agencies. Every move, Sharratt argues, is overdetermined, with no pre-given solutions or external (political, authorial) impositions. What *Your Move* represented was not so much a story as a structure of relations - a structure not equivalent, but homologous to some part of the real world. What was offered, then, was "an exercise in *understanding* rather than simply involvement" (ibid.).

This, I think, is a useful way to begin to theorize *Home and Away* and *Neighbours*' form - as exercises in understanding, opportunities to learn and practise particular modes of expertise; as recognisable but dynamic structures of relations; as the participation in a game (Buckingham, 1987: 69) and drama, in mundane but also fantastic scenarios. My other examples and *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* indicate, I think, that *Your Move* is not quite so special an example of this practice as Sharratt suggests - which, he indicates, is in any case part of a broader cultural tendency. Further, if *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* continue a more general but specific historical process, then in recent years they have been joined, I would argue, by various popular cultural

forms, of which the most obvious are ITV's *Dear Davina*, Channel 4's *People's Trial* and *Love Life*, and especially the BBC's *Do the Right Thing* and *Dear Dilemma*. In later chapters I will argue that all of these texts are similar in being what Foucault has termed technologies of self-government (Foucault, 1988). In doing so I will show how early problem pages are only their most obvious and direct antecedents. I will also show how as part of a broad arena for learning (Gledhill, 1992: 114) *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* combine with a variety of discourses and practices within and beyond popular entertainment.

#### Footnotes

1. This said, it is not Barthes' notion of narrative function which I apply here. The reason for this, briefly, is my belief that a degree of slippage occurs in Barthes' use of function, signification and discourse. Initially, he invokes Propp's version of narrative function (Barthes, 1977: 89), moving then to semiotic signification and narrative discourse. Propp's analysis of folktales did not direct or broaden itself to either of these latter areas (see Propp, 1968: 21ff). For Barthes, a narrative function appears to be both the function that a character or event performs for the text's synthetic or internal structure (the skeletal or motor narrative as Propp understood it), and the function that that given action performs for the text's broader narrative or discursive economy. It is the former level of *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*'s economy that I discuss here (in a sense the Proppian functions, though the two programmes' structure and content do not invite an application of Propp). Part of the value of Barthes' work is in his revelation of the hermeneutic complexity, at this level, of many literary works; and it is this move that is followed by Allen (1985: chapter 4), Buckingham (1987: chapter 2) and others.

2. The theorists I have in mind when I use this term are Claude Levi-Strauss (1981), Dick Hebdige (1979) and Umberto Eco (1987). Part of Umberto Eco's analysis of *Casablanca* seems especially germane to *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* in this context. Eco notes that neither Curtiz nor his famous actors knew what was going to happen from one scene to the



next in the making of *Casablanca* (Eco, 1987: 201). The film does not fit classical generic or narrative patterns, argues Eco, because for each scene the director drew unconsciously on the heightened moments recognizable from a variety of well-known films. This is one of the primary reasons, Eco suggests, that *Casablanca* achieved cult status. *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* are not cult objects (though at a stretch, in some contexts, and like *Prisoner Cell Block H*, they are camp icons). I would argue, though, that something similar occurs in their production. As various behind-the-scenes television programmes have indicated, the texts' scripts and narratives are put together very quickly, even by soap terms. Like comics and some films, *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*, I would argue, are more dependent than most soap operas on the broadly recognizable scene - scenes that take from various of the styles of popular culture, and which also depend on a wide recognition of what I will go on to call the structure of modern relations.

3. We should note that the apparent villains in the episodes I have examined, Russell and Jill (*Neighbours*) and Les (*Home and Away*), in later episodes go through a similar process to that of Jack.

4. Frith and Horne (1987) note that the hostility exhibited by some notable critics to consumerism is as much led by a sense of aesthetic distinction as it is by broad notions of value, literacy or nationhood (see, too, Hebdige, 1988 and White, 1983, who make a similar point from different perspectives). Undoubtedly, for critics like Hoggart and Orwell *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*'s utopias represent the realization of dire portent - see Hoggart's parody of 1950s cheap romantic fiction: *Kosy Holiday Kamp* (Hoggart, 1957: 193), and Orwell's critique of light entertainment radio: *Pleasure Spots* (Orwell, 1979: 104).

5. In Narrative 1 of Episode 2, *Neighbours*, the text in fact stages a carnival in Ramsay Street which characteristically performs a narrative and affective function. Julie hires a fun-fair for her daughter Hannah's birthday in order to spite Philip (Julie's husband, Hannah's father). Without telling Julie, Philip spent \$2000 on a private detective to find his son, Michael (Julie's stepson, who in previous episodes terrorized her). Furious at Philip's double duplicity (not communicating and trying to bring Michael back to their home when he promised the he would not), Julie splashes \$2000 on the fair without consulting Philip. The viewers and a number of the characters are able to enjoy the spectacle and fun (time and work apparently no object for the characters). The text here casts spending as a legitimate mode of female resistance - and in fact does so in another narrative during this episode (in Narrative 5

Lauren persuades Pam to invest in a race horse with her. Pam joins the syndicate on the condition that Lauren won't tell her husband, Doug: "I think I'm entitled to indulge myself", Pam agrees.). The text characteristically tempers its hedonism. Julie is afforded some grip on a notion of good parenting. When Hannah gushes thanks to Julie, saying that everyone wants to be her friend, pointedly, Julie tells her not to think that parties are the only way to find friends. Two scenes later, too, Julie admits to and apologizes for her extravagances, explaining that she was driven to them by Philip's dishonesty.

6. In recent weeks (winter 1996/7) the reminder-opening music in *Neighbours* has shifted from light entertainment melodrama to light entertainment and melodrama. This is an indicator of the fact that *Neighbours* has always aspired less to melodramatic realism than *Home and Away*.

### Chapter 3: *Interviewing Young People*

The empirical study involved tape-recording interviews with groups of 13-16 year olds in one Edinburgh High School and with individual teenagers in their homes in the Lothians and Fife. I will detail the methods used in both sets of interviews shortly. First I will provide a brief context for the methods.

#### 1. Introduction and rationale

In the 1980s and 90s, what are broadly termed audience studies have proliferated in media and cultural studies. The reasons for the 'turn to ethnography' and the important features of the most valuable studies are now well documented (for the best of numerous summaries, see Moores, 1990 and 1993; Turner, 1990; and McGuigan, 1992). Consequently, there is no need for details to be provided here. Instead I will summarise what the key studies of recent years share; where they diverge and what problems they present; and where the empirical part of this study fits in relation to recent audience work.

The shifts and tensions in the development of the textual analysis of soap opera and popular entertainment which I identify in chapters 1 and 2 are closely related to the growth of qualitative audience studies in the last fifteen years. In various ways, most of the studies represent a response to the logic and domination of Screen theory, and a more pervasive notion of media 'effects'. Whether emerging from French structuralism or particular branches of the



social sciences, theories of media consumption tended to neglect audience meanings and uses altogether, or, worse, conceived of viewers/spectators as in some way impaired.

David Morley was the first cultural studies researcher to investigate the relationship between a critical theory of media reception and audiences' actual decodings of a television programme (Morley, 1980). The findings of *The Nationwide Audience* (sometimes too readily recast as singular weaknesses) guided a number of the studies following it in the 1980s. Researchers shared an understanding of the importance of: the polysemic and interdiscursive nature of texts and how audiences interpret them; the social and cultural contexts within which media were consumed; the cultural competencies or resources which audiences utilized when consuming media - including and beyond class and education; different genres (from News and factual genres, that is) and how they related to different groups and pleasures; how media were socially and culturally used, as well as interpreted in a narrower sense; and recognizing and reflecting upon the unequal relations between all of the participants in a particular study.

Clearly not all of the studies following that of Morley could privilege all of these understandings at once. Further, even if different studies share a belief in the importance of, for example, context or use, they might, and in some cases do, mobilize quite different conceptions of these terms. Indeed, the recent audience work in media and cultural studies is richly diverse, as well as being representative of a broad shift in the paradigm's emphasis. As well as a strength, however, the different approaches and rationales of the numerous studies can indicate gaps, disjunctions and some weaknesses.

One of the most obvious contradictions is that despite the common reference to media and cultural studies' 'turn to ethnography' in the 1980s, few ethnographies 'proper' have in actuality been conducted - that is, few ethnographies by the terms of critics like Nightingale (1989) and Gillespie (1995). If researchers are to know in detail the habits and rituals of a particular community where media are consumed, then it is not enough, argues Gillespie, that they spend an hour or two there tape-recording an interview. Nightingale questions whether the 'new' audience researchers employ the term ethnography primarily in an effort after the status achieved by earlier, 'genuine' ethnographic work in cultural studies (like, for example, Willis, 1977).

Both researchers have a point. In a number of ways the broad use of the term ethnography has been neither helpful nor accurate. However, a number of the valuable audience studies of recent years neither make any strong claims to ethnographic validity, nor follow the aims of, for example, Gillespie's ethnography of young British-Asians' media consumption. Indeed, among the ethnographies 'proper' there are, I would argue, differing aims and principles. The strength of James Lull's (1990) work, for example, is the extent of its observation and degree of its detailed description of the television consumption of numerous families. What it lacks is a sustained theoretical analysis of particular consumers' engagements with particular media. This, I would argue is the strength of Eric Hirsch's (1992) ethnography of one family's media consumption. Neither of these researchers shares Gillespie's interest in ethnicity, identity and local community.

What all of these researchers share is a move away from an interest in texts and their effects to an investigation of how media fit into social and cultural dynamics - from texts to contexts. Given, in particular, the textual determinism of *Screen*, this shift is understandable. With other critics, however, I would argue that in some ways it is regrettable. Neglected in some recent empirical studies are the specificities and effectivities of particular texts and products; and how it is that consumers interact with their structures as well as those of family or neighbourhood (see Gray, 1987; Brunsdon, 1991; and Caughie, 1991 for similar criticisms). (1).

The studies of the consumption of soap opera and romantic fiction in media and cultural studies in the 1980s and 90s in different ways and to varying degrees take an interest in the dynamics of media's contexts of reception. Unlike the ethnographies to which I refer above, however, they share a special interest in genre and how it relates to the formulation of especially gendered - but also ethnic (Liebes and Katz, 1990) and class (Fowler, 1991) - identities. Of these studies, that of Janice Radway (1987) most successfully combines a detailed ethnography with the analysis of a particular genre and how it fits into the lives of a specific, American community of women.

Radway's work is exemplary, and shows clearly the important and contradictory place of formulaic romance in women's lives. (Bridget Fowler's study of Scottish women's consumption of romantic fiction does the same with less ethnographic detail, but with more theoretical rigor and a sharper focus on history and social difference than Radway's study.) Radway's *Reading the Romance*, however, is part of a broader shift in emphasis in media and cultural studies to



the study of gender and generic pleasures which has not been welcomed by all. Partly, this is because the move to the study of gender and genre, arguably, has been overdone. Despised genres and previously repressed female voices, within the limited boundaries of media and cultural studies at least, have been more than returned; and other media and audiences have been neglected. Relatedly, though, it is not just that 'feminine pleasures' have tended to dominate recent audience studies, it is also the ways in which soap opera, romance and women audiences have been analysed that is the source of concern for some critics.

It has been argued that some audience work has tended to react more than constructively respond to previously dominant theories of ideological effect. It tends toward a populist endorsement of pleasure, difference and 'resistance', rather than critical investigation and explanation (Seaman, 1992; Gray, 1987; McGuigan, 1992). While recognizing the limits of established theories of power and ideology, we must nonetheless hold onto and try to renew our understanding of how audiences, still, are positioned within dominant structures (Gray, 1987: 28). We must also continue to theorize questions of pleasure and gender alongside and in relation to the ways in which politics, the economy and class are organized.

In the wake of Althusser and Gramsci, the theorists whose work has most influenced recent researches of media and cultural consumption are Pierre Bourdieu (see Fowler, 1991; Thornton, 1995; and Skeggs, 1997), Michel Foucault (see Walkerdine, 1986 and 1993; and Skeggs, 1997) and Valentin Volosinov (see Barker, 1989). There are important differences between the ideas of these theorists (see Fowler, 1997: 92-93 for an assessment of the key differences

between the work of Bourdieu and Foucault). The researchers who have applied their theories to cultural consumption, though, all articulate particular notions of capital or resources - that is, consumers' utilization of unevenly distributed cultural, discursive or linguistic resources. These resources, as I noted in chapter 2, are "already in circulation and brought to...programme(s) (for instance) by viewers" (Brunsdon, 1981: 37). In this sense, as I argued in chapter 1, neither texts nor audiences can be theorized in isolation; both must be understood as part of a broad reading formation (Feuer, 1989: 458) or interdiscursive network (Kuhn, 1984: 27).

Part of audience researchers' task, then, is to locate interviewees' responses within such a network. In different ways, this idea has informed empirical studies and textual analyses. Some of the empirical researchers who I would argue have best illustrated how history is reworked in the contemporary practices of groups and individuals are Phil Cohen (1984 and 1997), Bridget Fowler (1991) and Beverley Skeggs (1997). (2). The textual or genre researchers who best show the genesis of the matrix of which popular entertainments are a part are Paul Hunter (1990), Colin Mercer (1986 and 1988) - both of whose work I will consider in chapter 6 - and, as I indicate in chapter 1, Christine Gledhill (1987 and 1992).

I follow Gledhill's lead, as well as that provided by the other researchers to whom I refer in the latter stages of chapter 2 (Kuhn, 1984; Feuer, 1989; Coward, 1990; Sharratt, 1980). That is, I want to uncover some of the "conditions and possibilities" of my interviewees' reading (Gledhill, 1988: 74). This is not in a search for absolute origins, or to prove that responses are the causes of textual or

historical effects; but, rather, as I argue in chapter 1, to try to begin to show the social and historical relations of which responses and texts are a part. In this respect, the empirical study, like the thesis generally, is informed by the ideas of Michel Foucault - in particular his work on government (Foucault, 1991) and technologies of self (Foucault, 1988), but more generally his influential theories of discourse, knowledge and power.

Two empirical researchers who contribute to the same theoretical perspective - and who also investigate popular media and young people - are Valerie Walkerdine and David Buckingham. Buckingham argues that

"(w)hile broad structural factors such as class clearly do influence the ways in which individuals make sense of television, it is important to regard these not as external constraints, but as social relationships which are actualized or brought into play in the specific context of the discourse itself. 'Decoding' television is itself a social process, not merely an effect of other social processes." (Buckingham, 1991: 233).

Buckingham also supports the arguments of Kuhn (1984) and Feuer (1989) that we must treat audiences' responses as cultural and discursive practices. He notes that in his analysis of young people's responses to *EastEnders* (Buckingham, 1987) he neglected to do so, generally taking interviewees' comments at face value (Buckingham, 1991: 228). (3). Instead, he says, we must consider the discursive nature of responses. Interviewees select their answers and ideas from a repertoire of linguistic resources. This repertoire must be understood as structured and finite; and interviewees will have different degrees of access to the same and sometimes different repertoires. The interview



context itself, as well as the text in question, Buckingham argues, will place certain limitations on what can and cannot be said and on which discourses will be animated and reproduced (ibid., p.230).

Though he notes how difficult it is to define the boundaries of an influential context, it is the specifics of the interview group and its dynamics in which Buckingham takes the greatest interest. As such, his notion of discursive positioning is informed specifically by social and psychological linguistic theory - by a particular conception of the rhetorical function of language (for an example of this approach see Potter and Wetherell, 1987, on whose work Buckingham draws). However, throughout his analysis Buckingham notes that his interviewees' responses are produced and reproduced within a social and historical sphere which extends well beyond the context of the interview group. The discourses of class, ethnicity and gender articulated by his respondents, he says, are overdetermined in that they "bring(s) into play a set of already well-established...positions." (Buckingham, 1991: 242). (4).

The positions which are taken up most strongly and frequently by Buckingham's respondents are gendered ones; and he extends his interest in the production of gendered identities within the specific context of qualitative interviewing in a later essay (Buckingham, 1993b). This interest is shared by Valerie Walkerdine in her studies of young girls and domestically-consumed films (Walkerdine, 1986 and 1993). Walkerdine, though, takes a broader and more sustained interest than Buckingham in questions of history and power and employs a Foucauldian framework of analysis.

As such, though Walkerdine's studies are differently oriented to this one they employ a similar notion of discursive practice and effectivity.

For Walkerdine, the popular text under analysis and the empirical investigation of its consumption are 'relay points' (Walkerdine, 1993: 85). This is Colin Mercer's (1988) understanding of popular entertainments and likewise is for Nikolas Rose (1989) how familial and other institutional practices are connected and normalized (as well as that of Mercer, I will consider Rose's work in chapter 6). Following Foucault (1988) and these theorists, a relay point we may say is a technology of self-government. Texts and the interview context, for Walkerdine, are inscribed within and actualize relations of history and power. Simultaneously, they regulate and are productive of subjectivity, meaning, and of particular fantasies and desires:

"I will argue that they (the meanings which Walkerdine's interviewees make of the film *Annie*) are not shaped either in terms of stage of development, nor simply through a process of linguistic meaning-making in interaction with the text. They are produced in the complex family history in which the participants are already inscribed in meanings - the meanings which regulate them, the meanings through which their actions, needs, desires and fantasies are made to signify...(M)y analysis understands the text as central not in making the family dynamic but in having a place through which certain meanings can be made...I wish to demonstrate that the film forms the relay point in a complex and ongoing discussion within the family about their plight...it allows them to dream, understand and face conflicts over what is happening to them. The video is a relay point in producing ways of engaging with what is going on - and so am I..." (ibid., pp.81-85).

This is the notion of engagement - with the programmes and the interviews - of government and of 'discursive productivity' (Probyn, 1993b: 284) I took to the empirical study. Like Buckingham and Walkerdine, I was interested to discover the nature of interviewees' engagements with popular entertainment, but proceeded on the understanding that this was simultaneously and inseparably an engagement with other parts of culture and history. The positions taken up and discourses reproduced by my respondents are 'interpretations' of *Home and Away* and *Neighbours*. They are also, simultaneously, interpretations of their own lives and the historical moment in the narrowest and broadest sense. Importantly, *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* are the focus of the interviews and limit the study's scope in obvious ways. Throughout, though, the programmes are understood as 'relay points' within a broad network of meaning.

To the greatest extent, then, the empirical part of this study shares the aims of Buckingham and Walkerdine. For pragmatic as well as theoretical reasons, however, it is identical to neither. In terms of substance, the study is closest to those of Buckingham (1991 and 1993). Buckingham, though, takes a greater interest in younger children and, as I have noted, socio-linguistics. Theoretically, the empirical study is closer to those of Walkerdine (1986 and 1993) - as well as being led by the theorists who have not conducted fieldwork to whose studies I refer above. Walkerdine, however, does not only employ a Foucauldian notion of history and power; she combines this with feminist psychoanalysis, and this is one way in which her studies distinguish themselves from this one.



Also unlike those of Valerie Walkerdine, this study is not an ethnographic one. Because of her detailed knowledge of her interviewees' school and familial lives, Walkerdine is able to make convincing arguments about the specific class, familial and gender relations into which the consumption of popular media enters. This study, though similarly driven theoretically, can say less about the specific nature of interviewees' material existences and cultural experiences. It is more interested in the specificities of the way in which *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* are engaged with, and in how this is generalized across groups and individual young people, and culture.

## 2. Methods

### (i) *Sample*

One of the study's rationale is to help rectify the dearth of studies of young people and media consumption generally in media and cultural studies and specifically with regard to teenagers and soap opera. As such, with regard to the sample, the study's primary category of interest is young people, specifically 13-16 year olds. *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* are concerned with the easing of teenagers' passage into adulthood. The programmes among other things naturalize the idea that youth is a period of transition replete with problems. Following Paul Hunter's study of the literature popular in Britain before novels, a large part of the programmes is about the 'travails' of teenagers - their troubled journey to adulthood and the transformative work they must conduct on themselves (Hunter, 1990). One of the study's aims is to determine what young people's response is to this appeal and to the programmes' representations of

teenagers. Equally important, though, is how the interviewees respond to programmes' projects and representations generally.

In total I interviewed 50 schoolchildren between the ages of 13 and 16 years. Eight are individual interviews in homes, the rest group interviews conducted in one Edinburgh High School. In terms of gender, the mix of interviewees is close to 50:50. In terms of class, the missing classes are the upper ones - upper middle and upper classes. Broadly, the group interviews are an even mix of working class and lower middle-class interviewees. Questionnaires were not conducted. The indices I use, which I think are quite safe, are: the school's catchment; the fact that I asked the teacher who helped me for a mix of interviewees in terms of background and ability; and the interviewees' use, or not, of Edinburgh-Scots. In various ways the interviewees' broad class identities were confirmed in the course of interviews.

The individual interviews were different in class terms from the group ones in that none of the interviewees live in poor areas. Both group and individual interviewees are samples of convenience, but the individual ones even more so. They are more a reflection of my own class because of problems gaining access to homes. (5). All of the individual interviewees and their parents value higher education and each individual respondent intended to enter it in the coming years. However, none of the individual interviewees are members of wealthy, propertied families. All attended their local comprehensive school. One interviewee only lives in a distinctly working-class home and neighbourhood. One lives in a prefabricated home/immobile caravan with her single mother. I will provide brief profiles of the individual interviewees shortly.

With regard to ethnicity, all of my interviewees are British and Caucasian. Almost all of them are Scottish, the only variation being English. All of the group interviewees live in Edinburgh. The individual interviewees live in Edinburgh (3), Midlothian (3) and south-east Fife (2). The only version of Scottishness that stands out in the interviews (that is, as being distinct beyond being from south-east urban and suburban Scotland) is Italian-Scottish, and I discuss the interviewee in question in chapter 5.

#### (ii) *Group interviews*

I conducted ten group interviews at Broughton High. Seven were of mixed gender, one all-female, two all-male. All the groups but two had four members. (On two occasions only three interviewees could be mustered when a pupil who had agreed to participate was absent from school.) The groups are evenly spread across the 13-16 age range. Two interviews were conducted as pilots. While informative, these interviews are in fact little different in their form and content from the interviews 'proper' - as an examination of the transcripts shows.

From the outset it was intended that both group and individual interviews should be conducted. This is because it was believed that both methods would prove productive, and because of the general dearth of individual interviewing in media and cultural studies. It was considered that a comparison of the group findings with those of the individual interviews might prove instructive. However, it was not considered that either method would produce more interesting or valid findings, or that either set of



findings would be theoretically-critically distinct from the other. Some researchers choose to use group interviewing in the belief that it is more socially interactive and so more representative of real life. This rationale, for example, is employed by Liebes and Katz (1990: 29). David Morley is criticized by Jordin and Brunt for advancing a similar belief when conducting his *Nationwide* audience study (Jordin and Brunt, 1988: 232, and see Morley, 1981). Like Jordin and Brunt, I would argue that Morley is "quite wrong to imply that an 'individually placed interview' necessitates the exclusion of 'social context' while a group-based interview does not." (Jordin and Brunt, 1988: 234, quoting here Wren-Lewis, 1983). Social and cultural differences, as Jordin and Brunt suggest (*ibid.*, pp.248-249), may be heightened and put into sharper relief by group interviews. This, as I will consider, is the case with regard to some of my group interviews. Class and gendered practices are heightened by: class and gender clashes; single gender groups; and by the possibilities offered by a group generally. However, "(w)hat are revealed in the...group processes...are the same...laws and processes which govern the...individual viewer". (Jordin and Brunt, 1988: 248-249).

Jordin and Brunt suggest that the value of a group interview is the way in which it allows readings to be renegotiated and modified as a "series of interactions" proceeds (Jordin and Brunt, 1988: 242-243). This, I think, is more a question of quantity than quality or validity. Clearly, groups tend to generate more and perhaps more diverse discussion. I do not think, though, that in my research or research like it groups or group members arrive at more secure or true positions or ideas. Contradiction is as evident in my group interviews - at the level of group and individual response - as in my individual ones. Often there is group consensus,

often disagreement between members. Some of my individual interviews are in fact longer and more complex than some of my group ones - some interviewees able to be more animated, reflective and considered than might be the case in a group interview. The important point for this study, I think, is the evident and important similarity of general and specific responses given to me by group and individual interviewees. This is clear from my transcripts; from the extensive recurring findings I list in the following chapter (where I have had to provide only some of what are more numerous examples of recurring findings); and from the small number of responses which did not recur.

With regard to the specific procedures I used for the group interviews, I chose four as an ideal number of participants because I wanted an equal gender mix and considered 2 to be too few interviewees and 6 too many. This was based on my previous experience of tape-recording interviews with young people about their leisure and media consumption. In 45 minutes, which was the average length of the interviews, a group of 4 can generate a wide-ranging discussion with each member able to make sustained and extensive contributions. With 6 interviewees it is too easy for particular members to become marginalised.

Interviews were conducted in a standard classroom. Interviewees arrived having been excused from a lesson and selected by the teacher helping me at Broughton High. I asked Wendy Munro, the teacher helping me, for pupils the same age in a particular interview, and conducted interviews across the 2nd to 5th years (the 13-16 year age range). I also asked Wendy for two pupils of each gender, if possible and with the exception of the single gender interviews. My

last request was that across all of the 10 interviews the mix of interviewees' abilities and backgrounds should be as broad as possible.

Interviewees arrived knowing very little about me and the study. When asking them to participate Wendy had given respondents brief details only. The pupils whom I interviewed latterly had the benefit of peer disclosure - benefit in that almost all respondents enjoyed being interviewed and told their friends that it was painless and preferable to a lesson. Interviewees approached me and the tape recorder with a mixture of wariness and amusement. For the reasons I provide in the introduction to the thesis - but which I am sure are obvious to anyone living in Britain - they found it hard to believe that anyone would want to conduct a study of anything as frivolous as *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*. In introducing myself and the study to them, I had to assure interviewees that I really was serious, while simultaneously signaling recognition of their amusement/the programmes' status as bad and ridiculed cultural objects (a difficult negotiation which continued throughout the interviews). After thanking them for agreeing to take part, I assured respondents that the interview was informal, in no way a test, and that their responses were confidential. I said that there were no correct answers to my questions; that I did not know myself what they would say - thus the interviews; and that what was important was that they gave me their own ideas and views.

Typical to in-depth interviewing, the tape-recorded sessions followed a semi-structured pattern (see, for example, Liebes and Katz, 1990: 27). I ensured that the same areas of interest were covered in each interview, but also tried to pursue the different, related or more specific ones raised



by respondents. The same interview schedule (appendix 1) was used throughout group and individual interviews with only slight refinements being made in the light of the two pilot sessions. I tried to keep the interviews as free-flowing as possible and returned to the schedule only if an area had been exhausted or interviewees had clearly strayed well beyond the session's focus. As is frequently noted (see, for example, Gillespie, 1995: 64), the interviewer's task here is multiple and difficult: I had to give interviewees as much 'ownership' of the session as possible without letting the schedule disappear in favour of free association/anarchy; I had to probe the areas raised by interviewees without going so far as to alienate respondents or make them feel that they were being tested; and I had to let confident interviewees extend their thoughts and ideas as far as possible but endeavour to include all respondents equally in the session. As I indicate in chapter 5, I was mostly but not always successful in this task. And as I also note there, the skills I practised in the interviews (as well as the power dynamic) are in some ways similar to those demanded by other contexts - not least tutor-led student seminars.

### (iii) *Individual interviews*

The individual interviews followed the same, basic schedule as the group ones. Beyond being individual, their key differences from the group ones were that they occurred in interviewees' homes and involved the shared viewing of *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* - at their broadcast scheduled times - prior to the interview.

As I have noted, the decision to conduct individual interviews was based partly on the relative neglect of this method, and partly, and relatedly, to ascertain whether individual interviewing produced different results from group ones. The in-home method was also selected in the hope that, as in other studies (for example, Morley, 1986; Radway, 1987), something of the familial dynamic might be observed. In practice this proved optimistic. Of the eight individual interviews I conducted, on only one occasion did a parent watch *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* with the interviewee and me - a mother during the one lunchtime interview I conducted. Although group interviewees generally said that their fathers watched the programmes 'under protest', no fathers shared an in-home viewing. (Two of my individual interviewees were brought up by single mothers; two had a father who arrived home from work later than the programmes' transmission time.) On two occasions I watched *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* with interviewees alone - which, they said, was how they often but not always watched them. On five occasions I watched with interviewees and one or two of their siblings or friends.

Whether alone or in company, those with whom I shared a viewing, predictably, were acutely aware of my presence - despite any tactics I may have used to put them at their ease. Viewings occurred in mostly silence, with occasional groans and sniggers at the excesses of the programmes. I have no way of knowing the extent to which the immediate reception of the programmes would have been different had I been absent. One minor but important observation that I could make was that, in keeping with the comments of group interviewees and others' research (for example, Hobson, 1982; Modleski, 1982; Morley, 1986), all of the mothers of interviewees prepared meals while *Neighbours* and *Home and*

Away were being watched, or while the interview was being conducted (on five occasions the meal was prepared for the interviewer as well as the interviewee). All of the mothers were employed or full-time students. Only one flitted between watching *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* and making a meal.

Interviews were conducted immediately following the transmission and viewing of *Home and Away* and *Neighbours*. The sessions were tape-recorded in living rooms, dining rooms and kitchens, but always with interviewees alone - mothers appearing and hovering, preparing and delivering food, removing plates. One of the advantages of the shared viewing was that in the initial stages of the interview particular episodes could be discussed in some detail. At the beginning of the interview, I asked respondents to retell the episodes they had seen as if to someone who had not seen them. This method is taken from Liebes (1988), but did not prove as productive as appears to be the case in the Israeli researchers' study. (6). Interviewees repeated the programmes' three narratives in a basic and generally descriptive fashion, and were glad to move on quickly to interpretations and assessments of the episodes and programmes generally.

The individual interviews followed the same general pattern as the group ones, the primary difference being that interviewees were able to respond at greater length and in more detail. This, as I have noted, produced more of a quantitative than qualitative difference with the group sessions.



#### *(iv) Profiles*

##### *Broughton High*

Broughton High is a comprehensive secondary school and opened in 1972. It is situated approximately 2 miles north-west of Edinburgh city centre. The residential areas nearest to the school are Comely Bank and Stockbridge. Both the average and large-sized tenement flats in these areas attract high prices. The school is attractively located. It is adjacent to a pleasant municipal park and is surrounded by its own playing fields. Broughton High also sits next to Fettes College and its extensive grounds. Fettes is one of numerous prestigious fee-paying schools in Edinburgh.

Broughton High serves seven primary schools which are situated at varying distances from the secondary school and - almost correspondingly - in areas of varying degrees of wealth. 15% of Broughton High's roll is from outwith its catchment area. The school's roll in 1996 was 1010. During the same period it had 82 full-time members of staff.

From the information booklet given to parents in 1997, and from my visits to the school, it is obvious that both academically and financially Broughton High is a healthy secondary school. It has a broad curriculum and encourages students from a variety of backgrounds to extend themselves in curricular and numerous extra-curricular activities. The school is particularly proud of its excellent music teaching and facilities. Broughton High is home to the City of Edinburgh Music school which is attended by 30 of Scotland's

most gifted young musicians. Another 30 - in 1995, 30 Broughton High students were accepted onto degrees at British universities.

### *Individual interviewees*

These brief outlines are intended to provide readers with some picture of the respondents interviewed individually. The information provided was gleaned from the interviews and brief visits to homes only.

**D, male (16):** D lives in a small Midlothian town 8 miles south of Edinburgh. D's home was the most middle-class one that I visited. Beyond middle-class art and artefacts, D's home was the oldest and most spacious of all of my individual interviewees. Property agents would describe it as being attractively located and as having character. D was easily the most academically confident of my interviewees. He located himself quickly in the interview as someone who would soon be studying English literature at Edinburgh University. He said that he enjoyed reading but that he did not read as much as he should. He also enjoyed watching and playing football - with a friend in the park, not in a team. D has no brothers or sisters. D discussed football in a similar fashion to the way in which he discussed *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* - that is, as a critic and ironist. D said that he liked *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* and their characters, but mostly because they made him laugh. In this sense his criticism was generally, but not always, detached. D was a male and middle-class version of campness and fun. An interesting point of comparison is the Italian-Scottish group interviewee I discuss in chapter 5. That interviewee is also decidedly camp, but is working-class and much happier to immerse himself in the programmes.

**L, female (16):** L lives in a small town on the shores of the firth of Forth in the south of Fife. The town and the street L lives in are predominantly

working-class - a large number of their inhabitants is employed by the local shipyard. L's house is semi-detached, three rooms up and down. L lives with her mum and dad and her younger brother. L defined herself mostly in relation to her friends and family, but also, from the outset, as a young woman. She asked about the differences between male and female interviewees, and said that she believed girls were more mature than boys at her age. As well as being one of my most articulate and reflective interviewees, L was very open about how much she enjoyed *Home and Away* (L did not watch *Neighbours*). As well as being highly critical of them, L had a genuine affection for *Home and Away* and its characters - she enjoyed entering their world and laughing with and at them. A noteworthy point of comparison is one of my other 16 year old female individual interviewees, J. J lived in a more middle-class part of Edinburgh. Like L, she was both critically distant and emotionally involved but in subtly different ways. (I discuss J under obvious posturing in chapter 5, and consider L's responses in some detail in the latter stages of section 3 in the same chapter.) L hoped to study law at university when she finished school, but thought that she might not achieve the grades required.

#### N (16) and M

(13), males: N and M are brothers and live in a small town in Midlothian, 9 miles south-east of Edinburgh. The town is predominantly working-class. The street in which N and M live is mostly of terraced houses built in the 1930s which until the last ten years would all have been owned by the district council. N and M's home is one of a small number of new houses, detached and built on gap sites in the last twenty years. N and M's mother is a full-time mature student in Communication Studies at Queen Margaret College. Their father has a full-time job in Edinburgh. N is polite and considered. He has a clear sense of what he wants to do in future years and how difficult it will be to achieve. From the outset, N defines himself as someone who is interested in the armed forces and who hopes to join the navy in the coming years. As a member of a junior branch of the Territorial Army, N sometimes spends weekends away on training exercises. As well as television programmes, films and books about the armed forces, N enjoys comedy as a popular genre. N gives unpretentious, carefully considered responses. He does not take *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* as seriously as he used to, but still enjoys them. M defines himself more in relation to his friends and family than his



older brother. He has tales to tell of incidents at school, at home, at the youth club and in friends' houses which he weaves into his assessment of the programmes - frequently in a contradictory, if not bemusing fashion. M is rush and disorder to his brother's measure. I reflect on the way in which M presents himself in section 4 of chapter 5. More than any of my respondents, M was keen to impress his maturity upon me and at points overshot himself. His responses were characterized by the censorship of drinking; a penchant for unrestricted realism (that is, special effects and violent events); and a hatred of *Neighbours*' Hannah, for whom he fantasized a violent death.

**T, female (16):** T lives alone with her mum in south-east Fife. They live on the fringes of a small town on the northern shores of the firth of Forth. Their immobile caravan is one of six in what is a cross between a field and a small wood. T's mother is a full-time mature student in Communication Studies at Queen Margaret College. T defined herself in relation to her friends and her mum, and to her passion for horse riding. When she leaves school she would like to work with horses, or maybe be a PE teacher. T is thoughtful in her responses. Like her close friend who I also interviewed (L, female, 16 - above), she is open and candid with regard to her feelings for the programmes and their characters. She is happy to admit to affection for both, and especially enjoyed *Home and Away*'s Meg and Blake romance-leukaemia narrative. T also enjoys reading romance novels aimed at teenage girls. Like her friend, T has strong views on the right and wrong intimate behaviour in particular instances. T doesn't take *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* as seriously as she used to. Like L, she now prefers *Brookside*, which is one of her favourite programmes.

**J, male (15):** J lives in an attractive and established (turn-of-the-century) tenement flat in a 'respectable' part of central Edinburgh. He lives with his mum and dad and his older brother. Both of J's parents have full-time jobs in Edinburgh. His father is a lecturer in higher education. J defined himself in relation to sport and his girlfriend - for example: basketball training and matches were prioritized over *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*; J recognized some of the programmes' relationship negotiations (and so considered them to be realistic) from those he had with his girlfriend. J was male and

middle-class, but was a different version of this to D, above. J was outgoing, confident and personable - a 'clubbable' version of masculinity. More than any of my interviewees, J engaged with the two programmes' comic-pantomime sensibility. His repeated refrain, "I like a bit of scandal", cemented the Sid James laugh of *Neighbours*' Lou to a Carry On tradition.

#### J (16) and R

(13), female: J and R are sisters who attend Broughton High. They live not far from the school with their mother, who works full-time in Edinburgh and who brings them up alone. J and R's mother recently completed a degree in Communication Studies at Queen Margaret College. The flat in which J and R live is part of one of the 'colonies' which feature in a number of Edinburgh's communities - model houses for working people, built in the mid and late-nineteenth century, terraced and on two levels with external stairs. The flats are small but command a high value on the property market, especially in J and R's neighbourhood. I have discussed J in part 4 of chapter 5. She quickly presented and defined herself as a world-weary soap opera critic, and as an expert in heterosexual relationships. As I discuss in chapter 5, and like some other interviewees, it is arguable that J's cynicism served to efface as much as lengthen the distance she put between herself and the programmes. Like my youngest male individual interviewee (M, 13), R defined herself in relation to her family and friends. When she recalled episodes, occasions of viewing etc., they were with her best friend or her sister (with whom I watched the programmes when I watched them with R). Her affection for the programmes was obviously linked in some ways to the close relationship she had with her friends and family. R was remarkably assured in her judgements, and explained to me exactly why particular characters should have taken particular courses of action. Like L (16), above, she loved traditional romance and family life, but presented herself as a strong and independent young woman.

#### (v) Coding

I was responsible for the full transcription and coding of all of the group and individual interviews. The category headings I have used for the recurring findings in chapter 4

clearly are not absolutely value-free. They are broad, interpretive themes which sometimes overlap, and could not, for instance, have been arrived at by a computer programme (for example, *Nudist* or *Ethnograph*). However, to the greatest extent of objectivity possible, I believe that the categories and findings presented in chapter 4 are the ones that recurred in the interviews. A sample interview transcript is provided in appendix 2, and more or all of the full interview transcripts are available to the reader on request.

### 3. Questions of method

#### (i) *Representativeness*

It would be wrong to think either that my small sample is representative, quantitatively, of all teenagers in Edinburgh or Britain, or that the responses I received are not representative of young people's thoughts and ideas in Britain in the 1990s. Class, gender and ethnicity are clearly important to the findings of the study, but in the absence of greater comparisons and more extensive empirical work no strong claims can be made for the singular importance of any of these as 'variables'. This said, gender emerges as the category of greatest interest, and this is because of the highly gendered nature of responses as well as the sample's clear gender mix.

The study's primary aim, I would argue, has been met. That is, we know the nature of young people's general and specific engagements with *Home and Away* and *Neighbours*. The study's greatest strength in this respect is the clear repetition of a particular mode of engagement and



understanding which can be given an historical and theoretical location. It would be valuable and interesting to take the study's findings and research the extent to which they are repeated across different social and cultural groups - particularly in the light of the latter arguments and speculations made in chapter 7. However, my findings as well as those of others indicate not only that we need extensive comparisons but also that we must re-think and research some of the recent historical changes in social positions and identities - how it is as 'variables' that class, gender and ethnicity interact; how some are more historically important or made more historically significant for some groups than others.

(ii) *A Foucauldian framework*

In media and cultural studies and in critical cultural theory generally, the ideas of Michel Foucault have been both influential and open to considerable criticism and debate. This study is influenced in a number of ways by Foucauldian ideas. More accurately, and more directly, it is led by the work of theorists who have reworked and applied Foucault's theories to particular parts of society and culture. I refer to this work and to specific Foucauldian ideas in chapter 6. Within the scope of this thesis there is not space enough to engage with the on-going and complicated debates about the nature and value of Foucault's extensive body of work. However, in the chapter which considers methods and the rationale for their selection it is appropriate to acknowledge some of the limits of Foucauldian theory, and to indicate the position of the thesis with regard to some of the debates.

Foucault's theories of discourse, knowledge and power have been widely criticized for being too general (see, for example, Fowler, 1997: 93; Sarup, 1993: 81; and Hall, 1988: 52). Foucault argues that all social relations are discursive and cannot be understood outside of their discursive formations. Power is everywhere, is inseparable from and is what produces knowledge. This position is most clearly stated in the opening sections of *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault, 1977: 27ff). Not surprisingly, this apparently totalizing vision has alienated numerous scholars from Foucault's work. Foucault's theories, it is argued, fail to locate power adequately and neglect important social and historical distinctions. They seem to leave no room either for concepts of human agency or social domination. Specifically, Foucault has been criticized for neglecting the fundamental importance of: capitalism, as the "mechanism that drives" social relations (Evans, 1993: 25); class and the State, as the "causally effective structures" of domination (Fowler, 1997: 93); sexual and gender difference (Moi, 1985: 95; and Giddens, 1992: 24); and the continuation of directive and sometimes violent forms of government and power (Sarup, 1993: 83).

To varying extents, each of these criticisms is legitimate. Foucault's work is exemplary and groundbreaking with regard to the specific techniques of individual domination (the best example being his analysis of Bentham's *Panopticon* - Foucault, 1977: 200ff), but has less to say on class and the stratified nature of social power. To be sure, Foucault's own position on how specific discursive practices relate to broader social hierarchies has shifted in the course of his studies. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault argues that discursive relations must be distinguished from 'primary relations'; that is,

"an institutional field, a set of events, practices, and political decisions, a sequence of economic processes that also involves demographic fluctuations, techniques of public assistance, manpower needs, different levels of unemployment etc." (Foucault, 1972: 157).

In his later work, however - in his move from archaeology to genealogy - Foucault underlines the symbiosis, rather than the distinction, between discursive and material, or discursive and non-discursive practices.

This emphasis, I think, has led both to strong criticisms of Foucault as a-material or a-political, and to unfortunate post-structuralist appropriations of Foucault's ideas - analyses where subjectivities lack coherence of any kind and power is understood only as a mode of endless difference. Both of these positions, I would argue, overlook not only the impact and value of Foucault's ideas, but also the productive ways in which they can be reworked and applied to particular contexts and parts of culture.

Further, it should be noted that Foucault neither rejected the notion of political or social resistance, nor theorized subjectivity as a condition of endless flux:

"The theoretical and practical experience that we have of our limits and of the possibility of moving beyond them is always limited and determined; thus we are always in the position of beginning again. But that does not mean that no work can be done except in disorder and contingency. The work in question has its generality, its systematicity, its homogeneity, and its stakes..." (Foucault, 1984a: 47).



What Foucault failed to do, as Stuart Hall indicates, was to connect his general theory of the effectivity of knowledge and power to specific forms of social and cultural hegemony (Hall, 1988: 53). This is what various theorists, including Hall, have attempted to do.

Unlike some critics of Foucault, and unlike Foucault himself, Hall sees no absolute distinction between ideology and discourse. We might consider discursive formations as "ideological formations that operate through discursive regularities" (ibid., p.51). Like Foucault, however, Hall rejects particular ways of theorizing ideology. That is, he rejects determinist theories of dominant ideology which depend on the notion of a pre-existent truth; a truth which is situated elsewhere and can be located, for instance, by 'de-mystifying' ideological texts. Such theories are not only too mechanistic in the way in which they conceive of power and social relations, they also relegate cultural phenomena to the status of effects. That is, in the most obvious example, the meaning and impact of such phenomena can be understood with reference to, are derived from, the way in which capitalism is organized.

The origins of the dominance of ideas and popular consent, Hall argues, is more complicated than this. We need to think of the ways in which residual and emergent discourses combine to lend dominant ideologies (Hall's example is Thatcherism) their persuasiveness. Further, such ideas achieve their effectivity not by emerging from a single, dominant institution; they rather "crisscross the social body" and can never be "exhaustively resume(d)" by the State (Hall, 1988: 53). Following Gramsci, Hall argues that social and cultural hegemony should be thought of as a process, an on-going struggle. In an uneven negotiation, social power

and predominant ideas are rebuilt in the moment of their destruction (ibid., p.54, Hall drawing on Gramsci, 1971: 168).

This Gramscian insight, I would argue, is not far away from Foucault's influential notion of power as generative or productive. When power is understood only as a dominant or repressive force - what Foucault called a juridical representation of power (Foucault, 1978: 88) - the reconstruction side of Gramsci's destruction/reconstruction duality, we may say, is forgotten. What also results from this notion of power is that, once again, social and cultural practices (the interpretation of a text, for example) are conceived of as the results of pre-existing truths, structures and dominance.

As I argue in chapter 2, and continue to in the chapters following it, popular entertainments should not be thought of as 'evidence' of something located elsewhere. They are, rather, one of a number of the important ways in which social relations of class, history, gender et cetera are elaborated and inscribed. They do not merely tell us about these relations, they actively constitute them. This is not, as Colin Mercer indicates, to argue that particular social and economic institutions are not of primary importance in this process. It is rather to suggest that programmes like *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* cannot be understood simply by being 'read off' against these structures (Mercer, 1986: 184 - I consider Mercer's work in chapter 6).

Further, to argue that power is a productive process is not to deny the continued existence of directive, coercive and violent forms of government. My argument, following Foucault and other theorists, is that in modern, 'developed'

societies the regimes of self-government which play upon and help to form particular desires, anxieties and modes of behaviour, increasingly are the most pervasive and important - and as Foucault has shown frequently work in tandem with some of the most directive forms of regulation.

To retain the notion of power as productive, Hall prefers the concept of discourses as practices. Social practices are not reducible to discourse, Hall argues; but it is through discursive practices that social relations are understood and become real. Quoting Gary Wickham, Hall notes that

"(b)y practices...I mean more than institutionally constrained actions and I mean more than something which is outside of knowledge...I mean common groupings of techniques and discourses" (Hall, 1988: 52).

This is the notion of practice I introduce in chapter 2 and which informs the thesis generally. The study is most interested in the ways in which our subjectivities are constituted through particular practices. The responses of my interviewees and the discursive practices of *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* are understood not as givens, but rather as techniques or technologies where theory and practice, ideas and realities combine; and where dominant ideas and social structures are re-articulated and remade.

The thesis examines those practices which lead us to focus attention on ourselves - what Foucault calls 'technologies of the self', which

"permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves" (Foucault, 1988: 18).



This will to self-examination and transformation, Foucault argues, is inseparable from broader 'technologies' of production, signification and domination. It is one of the most important forms of government in the modern period, which witnesses a shift away from Governance and Sovereignty to welfare, well-being and self-realization.

As I have noted, Foucault's work is most valuable for the way it invites us to rethink history and theory generally - which is also its weakness, for some critics. His ideas, however, have been applied to specific contexts and practices by other scholars to valuable effect. Stuart Hall's application of a Foucauldian notion of power to Thatcherism is one such application. Hall's suggestion that Foucauldian theory requires a greater articulation to institutional hegemony is met most fully, I would argue, by Nikolas Rose (1989). Rose examines the recent history and contemporary practices in self-government of military, workplace and familial institutions, the latter of which I consider in chapter 6.

As well as being a source of considerable debate, Foucault's theories have also been reworked productively by feminist researchers - one of whom being Valerie Walkerdine, to whose work I refer above. This thesis follows the lead provided by Walkerdine and other feminists such as Elspeth Probyn and Teresa de Lauretis, who argue that while "Foucault's theory...excludes...it doesn't preclude the consideration of gender." (de Lauretis, quoted in Probyn, 1993a: 116). For Probyn, popular television programmes and their consumption

are technologies in self-government, and are one of the important ways in which we learn and practise our gendered selves. I consider Probyn's ideas in chapters 5 and 7.

As these two chapters indicate, interviewees' practices in self-government frequently proved to be gendered ones. Following Probyn and others, we must understand these gendered identities as real and ideal, social and discursive, and as something that is achieved, not given - as practices in the production and reproduction of masculinity and femininity:

"to 'do' gender is not always to live up to normative conceptions of femininity and masculinity; it is to engage in behavior at the risk of gender assessment. While it is individuals who do gender, the enterprise is fundamentally interactional and institutional in character" (West and Zimmerman, 1987: 136-137).

Further, while it is the gendered nature of interviewees' identities that emerge most strongly, we must not consider this as entirely separate from other structures and practices in self-government, for example class, heterosexual and familial ones.

#### Footnotes

1. Lull, for example, is most guilty of this; Hirsch's sociology is excellent but takes no interest in textual analysis; the point at which Gillespie's rich ethnography becomes weakest, I would argue, is when she tries to relate her description of kinship structures to a textual analysis of *Neighbours*. I discuss this part of Gillespie's study under ethnicity in chapter 7.

2. Sarah Thornton's (1995) recent study is less historical only than these ones. Thornton shows in exemplary fashion how dance cultures fit into academic, music industry and popular media discourses.

3. The same criticism is made by Gray, 1987, and I would argue that some recent, otherwise valuable studies are weakened by their tendency, still, to take interviewees' responses at face value.

4. Buckingham notes himself the limits of the psychological-linguistic theory of discourse he employs - Buckingham, 1991: 243-244, and see Barker, 1993: 181 (n.18) for similar criticisms - and it is a narrower understanding of discursive practice than the one used in this thesis.

5. In the end I gained access to homes via contacts and the electronic mail at Queen Margaret College - the most helpful and willing parents being mature women students.

6. There are various and complicated reasons for this. My interviewees tended to retell episodes very briefly, literally, in a descriptive-denotive fashion. For whatever reason, Liebes' respondents interpret 'retell' in the researchers' desired way - i.e. what, for you, was this programme about? I also asked my interviewees what the programmes were 'about', to which they replied families, relationships, everyday problems et cetera. This could be interpreted as denotative or naive. That frame, though, doesn't take us very far and is quickly complicated - as is the case, as I argue in chapter 5, in Ien Ang's study. Beyond and including their retellings and responses to 'What are the programmes about?', my interviewees take up clear and consistent positions which indicate their familiarity and expertise with discourses of self knowledge and management. By the categories of Liebes' study, my interviewees discuss *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* in a segmented fashion because their modern culture's fascination with individuals and relationships affords them the security and ability to do so (Liebes, 1988: 290). This, as I indicate in chapter 5, is accurate and in the first instance is a useful way of understanding my interviewees' responses.

As I also indicate there, though, as an explanatory category it also demands some troubling. Part of the problem with the categories employed by Liebes (1988) and Liebes and Katz (1990), I would argue, is that they are too rigid. They use a literary structuralist model to understand *Dallas* and their interviewees' responses. Their study is highly sophisticated, but it repeats the problems encountered by Morley's (1980) threefold model (see Morley's own criticisms (Morley, 1981), and those of Wren-Lewis (1983) and Jordin



and Brunt (1986)). The Israeli researchers' linear, segmented and thematic are very close to Morley's dominant, negotiated and oppositional readings. Like that used in the *Nationwide Audience*, Liebes and Katz' model is dependent on the notion of a preferred reading and dominant ideology which some groups are better at resisting than others. Much more than that of Morley, the Israeli researchers' findings appear to lack nuance and different versions of opposition and negotiation. By the terms employed by Liebes and Katz, my interviewees could be understood either as generally 'duped' by *Home and Away* and *Neighbours*' dominant ideological message, or as highly critical. As I indicate in chapter 5, all of my interviewees' responses are negotiations of some sort, and not only with the structures of the texts. At stages they distance themselves from and immerse themselves in the programmes. When they appear to reject ('resist') *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*'s restricted worlds and ideal images, they frequently, in so doing, nevertheless reproduce some of the programmes' normalized practices.

The question begged by this footnote is why, then, was the retelling method used? My criticism is, of course, made with hindsight; and the model of analysis I have employed in this thesis to some extent resulted from my interview findings. Retelling remains a valuable method, but requires, I would argue, a different theoretical underpinning. My interviewees did not recognise it as the big question that it is in Liebes' study - What does this programme mean for you as a member of this society and culture? My interviewees did discuss *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* thematically - where the programmes fit into a bigger social and cultural picture, which for the Israeli researchers is an oppositional reading - but to a limited extent and as part of their general responses. No less than any of Liebes' retellers, of course every one of my interviewees' responses points to what *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* mean to them as members of a particular society and culture. If I had sat down with groups of teenagers and framed my interviews in a similar fashion to Liebes and Katz, then arguably I might have got more thematic, 'oppositional' readings. I would also, though, have got responses very similar to those that I did get, which at one level supports the Israeli researchers' arguments about the nature of modern societies and cultures.

## Chapter 4: *Recurring findings*

Below are the findings that recur in the group and individual interviews. They have been grouped into the broad themes that emerge, and divided into sub-categories. Not surprisingly, these groupings generally follow those that were consistently introduced by the interviewer. The extent to which particular responses or topics arose and were pursued without apparent prompting by the interviewer will be considered in the following chapter. The extent to which themes and categories overlap will also be considered there.

The description of a finding is illustrated by representative quotes. The full transcript of one interview is appended, and the transcripts of all of the interviews are available to the reader on request.

The findings of the group interviews will be listed first, followed by the individual ones. Unusual or idiosyncratic findings will be noted at the end of each of these sections.

### GROUP INTERVIEWS

#### 1. Realism

##### (i) *Narrative and aesthetic realism*

When first questioned, almost all group respondents said that both *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* were unreal. All believed British-produced soap operas and popular drama to be more real. Most respondents said that *Home and Away* was

more real than *Neighbours*, and this was frequently cited as a reason for preferring the former. Most respondents preferred *Home and Away* to *Neighbours*.

L (female, 16): I don't think any (either) of them are very realistic. I mean they're so unbelievable.

A (female, 16): They both show...It's not real life. It's like a fantasy life, you know, the ideal.

C (male, 16): Everyday life. *Home and Away*'s definitely more realistic than *Neighbours*.

A: The atmosphere in *Home and Away*, it's, like, more open. It's like...*Neighbours*, like, they're always in the same place...and house. You know it's a studio when you're in the house. But when you're in the house in *Home and Away* it doesn't seem like that. There are things, like...natural colours.

(group interview 2B)

A (female, 13): Yeah, *Home and Away* is a wee bit more realistic.

(group pilot interview 1)

J (female, 13): Yeah, *Casualty* and *The Bill*, they're much more realistic than all...*Home and Away*.

(group interview 1B)

R (male, 15): They're mair real to life. (British soap operas compared to *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*)

(group interview 3B)

On first questioning, almost all respondents said that the two programmes' narratives were lightweight, repetitive, transparent and highly predictable. All noted that the programmes' non-diegetic music heightened the transparency and predictability of the narratives.

M (male, 13): ...I think half the time the acting and the storylines are pretty thin. (MS: Spoils



pleasure?) No, I think that's part of it...They're quite fun, just to...you know, it's like reading a ninety nine pence paperback...

(group pilot interview 1)

MS: Do you all think you're able to predict the story?

C (female, 15): Usually

J (female, 15): Not always, but most of the time, especially *Neighbours*. (chorus of agreement)

S (female, 15): Yeah, *Neighbours*, very predictable.

R (female, 15): I know, it's so obvious.

J (later): You can always tell what's going to happen, with the music.

(group interview 3A)

S (male, 15): As soon as you hear a sad bit, you can tell immediately that something wrong is going to happen. (group agrees)

(group pilot interview 2)

D (male, 15): It's all a bit...melodramatic. They've got about ten pieces of mood music. And you can tell, they'll start up with dramatic music, and you can tell some big revelation...

(group interview 4B)

R (male, 15): Aye, it's like some music comes up, and yi ken it's going to be...something mad's goin' tae happen. So it's good, it's really funny.

(group interview 3B)

Almost all respondents said that the programmes' lack of narrative complexity, bad or exaggerated acting, and heightened, melodramatic affects were a source of derision and pleasure.

M (male, 13): ...people realise that the programmes aren't

that well made. I certainly realise that, and think that's part of it...People know that they're rubbish, but they watch them anyway.

(group pilot interview 1)

L (female, 15): In *Neighbours* all you get is them losing a stamp or something!

C (female, 15): Yes, it's more light-hearted.

R (male, 15): You can have fun moaning about it.

(group pilot interview 2)

G (male, 14): If they go too real, yi wouldnae watch them.

(group interview 1A)

M (male, 15): Aye, but it's funnier, ken (*Neighbours* and *Home and Away*'s lack of realism), but if it gets realistic it's like too used to seeing this, and it's no' even like you can tell what's going to happen an' that, ken. I think that's why it's funny and that, you ken what's gonnae happen an' that, ken, chuckle, chuckle...but you watch the end of it 'cause you want to ken what follows on.

(group interview 4A)

Almost all interviewees said that wondering what happened next in the narratives returned them to the programmes. Almost all, though, said that they generally knew what was going to happen because of the narratives' transparency, and because they had read about the stories' developments in magazines aimed at teenagers and women. Repeatedly, it was said that it was not so much what happened as how it happened, and the event's repercussions, which retained interviewees' interest.

K (female, 13): People find out what's going to happen, and then they have to watch it.

(group pilot interview 1)

J (male, 15): Ye ken what's gonnae happen, but ye wantae actually see it happen. (group agrees) ...you want to actually see it, just to prove it.

(group interview 4A)

(ii) *Settings and sets*

Most interviewees said that they liked where the programmes were set, and their various sets and locations. All, though, were critical of settings and sets, saying, again, that they were unreal. Beyond accents, sunshine and water sports, few of the interviewees could find anything that was especially Australian about the programmes. For some, though, the sense of Australianness that they provided was important.

S (male, 13): ...They dinnae even speak like Australians...

J female, 13): They always set it in the one room. They never show you the bedrooms. It gets boring seeing the same room all the time.

R (female, 13): ...I wish we had one (a diner like the Bayside diner); because it's somewhere to go to...because they always go after school...we've only got grotty cafe things...I think it would be a good idea to have one.

M (male, 13): I don't like it (the Bayside diner).

J: I think it's really good.

R: I remember once watching *Neighbours*, and you know in the living room they've got that big, pole thing, like brick...I remember once Paul was standing beside it, and he knocked it and it wobbled...it was just so funny...

S (later): Aye! (would like to live in Ramsay Street) 'Cause it's nice and hoat.

R: I'd like to live in *Home and Away*...

S: And they've goat swimming pools! (shouting)



R: ...because they've got the beach just round the corner.  
And they've got the diner...

J: And what'd be nice to do there, which they do, is  
whenever they're down they just go down and sit by the  
beach, and the sun beatin' down on them and it's really  
nice. Or they can go down to the diner or something; and  
there's the surf club and everything.

R: Uh-huh, it's good, really good...I'd love to have a  
beach...

S: Dae ken whit yi want a beach fir. Yiv already goat one -  
Granton harbour! It's nice and sunny! (shouting)

(group interview 1B)

C (female, 15): All the colours are really depressing...That  
stupid Bayiside diner - it's totally  
disgusting! *Neighbours* is bright, blue...but  
that *Home and Away* is just a depressing  
programme.

R (male, 15): But in *Neighbours* they're always moaning.

C: I know, but at least it's bright! (group laughs)...The  
thing with *Neighbours* is the sets - they're so bad! When  
they open the door there's a plastic wall. They're  
supposed to be brick, and we're supposed to believe it! I  
don't know if it's supposed to be tongue in cheek, or  
what...Surely it must be...

(group pilot interview 2)

S (female, 15): The houses and streets are all clean...they  
have swimming pools...

D (male, 15): It could be they just want to give a nice  
image of Australia. If they're exporting it  
round the world, they don't want to give a bad  
image.

MS: Anything especially Australian about the two programmes?

J (male, 15): Well, I've never been there, so I wouldn't  
know about the sort of...

MS: Is the Australianness of the two programmes important?

J: Yeah, probably. It's sunny...clean...nice...warm, and  
it's always cold here!

D: The stories may be a lot different if they were set over here. The storylines and the plots depend on Australianness.

J (later): Well, it's quite good they have a place to hang out and that (the diner).

D: Yeah.

S: There's nowhere like that round here.

D and J: No.

D: That's the thing.

J: And if there was...

S: Get out. You're not... (mimicking adult authority figure)

D: And it'd be packed.

S: They're supposed to be opening a place at the moment.

MS: I saw that in the *Herald and Post*. Off the Royal Mile somewhere?

S: Yeah.

MS: What do you think of the diner's decor?

J: Quite groovy. (irony, group laughs)

S: Yeah, it is quite good.

D: It seems quite a sort of hip place for people.

J: I'd go there.

D: I don't know if that's part, again, of the Australian culture, you know, if they have lots of places like that...But...yeah, it's a realistic place. It seems where everyone would want to be.

J: ...it's quite nice (the beach house in *Home and Away*). I think all the houses are nice, and bright. I'd take...any of them; but Pippa's...looks well lived and...horrible...

(group interview 4B)

A (male, 15): It's like an American diner. They try to copy an American diner. They've never done it...It

looks stupid.

M (male, 15): It looks false. (others agree)

T (male, 15): There's only two places for people to go in Summer Bay - the diner and the surf club. Like, whoopy doo! (group laughs)

M: In *Neighbours*, what about when they shut the door - you can see the wall moving. (group agrees and laughs)...it's always in this big massive kitchen; it's always, want a drink of juice?, then five minutes later, want a drink of juice? (group laughs and agrees)

(group interview 4A)

C (female, 15): ...it's the houses in *Neighbours* that are rubbish; because you knock on the door and the pictures on the wall shake.

S (female, 15): It's (the diner) like something out of *Happy Days*, you know? It's, like...cardboard...it's spotless.

(group interview 3A)

P (male, 15): ...Half o' them dinnae even talk Australian.

M (male, 15): Some of them sound English...Brad (makes it more Australian). The Australians go surfing.

R (male, 15): It's (Ramsay Street) a neat street.

P: Aye (would like to live there).

R: I would.

P: It's more spaced out.

R: I'd like to live there an' au, all those beaches.

(group interview 3B)

A (female, 16): In *Home and Away*, the beach would be good.

C (male, 16): If you didnae know the programme, and you had the sound down, and you showed it to somebody, they wouldnae be able to say, Australia.

(group interview 2B)



(iii) *Referential realism*

Explicitly and implicitly, respondents in all groups repeatedly referred to their personal experiences or to the sense they had of the real world, usually as a way of illustrating why they thought the programmes were unreal.

J (male, 15): ...in *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*, right, naebody smokes. Yer average teenager you see smoking, or taking drugs or something...I mean, you go round the playground in this school and you see, like, everybody smoking (laughs). It just doesnae happen in *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* - there's no such thing as smoking.

T (male, 15, later): You never see the teenagers getting drunk, as well. They never get drunk.

(group interview 4A)

G (male, 14): Naebody in *Home and Away* seems to be looking for a party or something. And same in *Neighbours*, having a party, it's just, like, no music...

R (female, 14): In a hoose.

G: ...or a packet of crisps, cup of coke or something (laughs).

MS: What do you think, generally, about the two programmes' settings?

R: They're tidy, always tidy.

D (male, 14): No' like Royston! (group laughs)

R (later): They dinnae swear, and they dinnae slap their bairns for dain something...

D: They dinnae get drunk.

J (female, 14): Yi wouldnae just get, it shouldn't have happened, ye'd get...

D: Slapped around the wa's.

R: Pippa never ever hits them. She doesnae even shout at them. She just stands and looks at them, and says, that's not...

G: If they goat too real, yi wouldnae watch them.

(group interview 1A)

C (female, 15): The problems are pathetic! Like, Karen smokes, or something. God! Get a life! That's not a problem. Problems are like...you become a junkie or get pregnant. They're sad. They're not up-to-date. People are having problems at age twenty that you have when you're ten...And no one smokes in either *Neighbours* or *Home and Away*; takes drugs, drinks alcohol...

(later in interview)...half the school comes up, 'we love you' and all that. God's sake! Let's get real!, know what I mean. And, like, I'm the only young person on my stair, right. And all the people on the stair don't just pop in and out for a chat like they do in *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*...You should see my neighbours, right. They're about ninety!...It's nothing like that in reality...what a life! I'd hate that life. They fall out for two days, and then they love each other again. It's so pathetic! There's no' many paggers (fights)...people hitting each other and that...the acting's really bad as well.

(group pilot interview 2)

J (female, 15): Summer Bay's too small. You don't see anyone different.

R (female, 15): I'm sure you would find teenagers out working.

S (female, 15): ...where in the world would you find people who have neighbours who just all go into each others' houses? (laughs, group laughs)...who all go out with each other?

(group interview 3A)

C (male, 16): See in *Neighbours*. Imagine, like, I live in

Pilton Crescent, imagine someone new comes in, or if ma mum and dad were to go away, I'd just move in with all ma neighbours. I'd just walk in an' oot ai au the hooses, all up and doon the street. It just doesnae happen like that.

(later in interview) Yi never see them gettin' belted up an' doon the hoose, you know what I mean. (group laughs) Yi never see them gettin' booted up an' doon the hoose, smacked off the walls an' that. (group in hysterics)

L (female, 16): ...They're too friendly.

A (female, 16): ...take last night, for example, with that car. Usually I'd get a belt for that.

D (male, 16): Y'd get killed for it!

(group interview 2B)

#### (iv) *Generic realism*

Almost all the interviewees indicated a knowledge of the texts' generic structures, of which they were generally critical. In particular, respondents were repeatedly critical of what may be called the structure of relations special to *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*.

M (male, 13): But *Neighbours* is funny like that. One moment they're really serious, the next moment they're really romantic, and then the next moment they're deliberately ridiculous!...The way the adults seem to get along so well all the time is a bit unrealistic. When they do have arguments, they seem to be able to make up too easily.

(group pilot interview 1)

C (female, 15): Och, it was either arguments or lovey-dovey, arguments or lovey-dovey.

S (female, 15



later): The parents are too understanding. Say, for instance, you said to your parents, I'm pregnant, or something like that, they wouldn't have anything to do with you.

(later in interview)...And the teachers are so understanding. You couldn't do that with any teachers. You couldn't, like, go up to them and say, I'm pregnant. What am I going to do?!, because they'd just turn round and say, right, I'm taking you to the headmaster right now.

(group interview 3A)

P (male, 15): They all know each other. It's like one big family. (MS: Like to live there?) Aye.

R (male, 15): I would.

P: They're always friendly with each other.

R: They're mair open than us.

(group interview 3B)

D (male, 15): ...the three of them being good friends, and then they completely fall out - but you know they'll get back together.

S (female, 15): ...their parents are always, like, so kind...That really annoys me...It's always, like, oh yes, it's alright, don't worry that you're pregnant. We'll stick by you (mocking, laughs).

(later in interview) Gaby and Lucy are always hunting after men, and Todd and Josh are always trying to get schemes up to get these girls to go out with them. That's about all that happens, actually (laughs).

(group interview 4B)

S (male, 15): And they're all so *nice* in *Neighbours*, as well. If someone arrives on the street, there's always a house for them to go to.

(later in interview) They're always apologising. People in *Home and Away* are always apologising...And they always try and help each other all the time...with their

problems.

C (female, 15): Aye, ken. They're nosey buggers!

S: If I was dying of AIDS, nobody'd give a shit! (group in hysterics)

C (later): You have to be in love, of course, to have sex; because everyone who has sex is in love (irony).

(group pilot interview 2)

R (female, 13): I'd like to live in...Home and Away...because they've got the beach just round the corner. And they've got the diner. And everyone's so friendly, and it's such a close...

(group interview 1B)

J (male, 15): And they hardly ever have real arguments, either. (group agrees)

(group interview 4A)

## 2. Characters

### (i) *Character likes*

In almost all group interviews, *Neighbours'* Joe Mangel was interviewees' favourite character, even though the actor (Mark Little) had departed the serial some time prior to the interviews. Repeatedly, the reasons given for liking Joe were that he was funny and down-to-earth. Of the characters that were current to the programmes at the time of interviewing, Brad Willis and Dorothy Burke (both of *Neighbours*) were most frequently cited as favourites. Brad was liked because he was 'daft' and 'like us', Dorothy because she was a 'nice person'.

C (female, 15): Joe Mangel's alright. He's like one of your uncles or something. He's the only one that's quite sort of down-to-earth.

(group pilot interview 2)

J (male, 15): Joe, he's good...He was one of their best.  
(MS: Why?)...He was quite down-to-earth. He seemed lovable. (group agrees)

D (male, 15): You can believe somebody would be like that.

J (earlier): I like Dorothy.

S (female, 15): Yeah, I like Dorothy. She's really good.  
(MS: Why?)...She takes everybody into her house, and you don't expect her to be like that. She lets Phoebe go and do stuff, and that, and you just don't expect her to be like that at all. (MS: Why not?) She's a teacher, and, like, a headmistress, and sometimes she's quite strict...But like at other times she's really easy going; like when Toby left she was really upset...was sweet. (laughs)

D: ...Dorothy Burke's a lot more easy-going, a lot more understanding.

(group interview 4B)

S (male, 13): She's alright (Dorothy).

J (female, 13): She's lovely.

S: Just 'cause she's a headteacher everybody thinks she's fairly hard. But, I mean, she helps everybody and that, and she's fair. She helps them, ken, wi' their work and everything.

(group interview 1B)

C (male, 16): Because he's just like us (why he likes Brad).  
(MS: Really?) Aye, he's nae got brains or nothing.

(group interview 2B)

M (male, 15): Brad (likes).



P (male, 15): Aye, Brad. (MS: Why?) 'Cause he's daft.

(group interview 3B)

(ii) *Character dislikes*

The most unpopular character across interviews was Lucy Robinson of *Neighbours*. Mostly female interviewees noted their dislike of, frequently hatred for, Lucy. Repeatedly, Lucy was referred to as being too brazen and extravagant, 'a tart'. No other character was so consistently disliked. However, Sophie of *Home and Away* was considered by more than one group to be too selfish; and three groups censured Brenda's (*Neighbours*) sexual/romantic behaviour - i.e./e.g., 'too desperate', 'a slut'.

L (female, 15): I'd love to stab that Lucy Robinson. I hate her.

C (female, 15): I hate that wifie with the big lips...Gemma. She nips ma skull.

(later in interview) Oh, that's what I hate, they all turn into pop stars.

L: His (Craig MacClachlan/Henry) thick neck! I hate his thick neck...

C: I hate him, I hate him.

(group pilot interview 2)

S (female, 15): I hate Lucy. (MS: Why?) Because she can't act, and she's fat. (laughs, group laughs) (MS: Really?) She is! I mean some of the clothes she wears! Sorry, clothes again. (laughs) They look really bad. And every single time you see her she's got a different dress on. (laughs and self-mocking:) I take a lot of notice of these things. And she's fat. I've said that too. She's like Gaby, sort of, but she's worse. She's a total whine-dog. (impersonates Lucy whining)

MS: You said that you liked Lucy? (to J, male, 15)

S: 'Cause she's sexy! (tone: of course)

J: That might be true, but I don't like her because she's sexy. I don't know...She's tended to erupt lately. (group laughs).

(group interview 4B)

J (female, 13): ...I really don't like Lucy. I don't like her at all. She's just a bit of a tart.

(group interview 1B)

A (female, 16): Sophie used to be okay. It's just that lately she's turned dead bigheaded...

L (female, 16): It's 'cause she's got pregnant.

A: She expects everyone to take notice of her. I don't like that.

L: The clothes she wears are terrible.

A: I know.

(group interview 2B)

J (female, 15): I don't like Brenda. (Why?) 'Cause she's always moaning.

C (female, 15): Fat slag.

S (female, 15): She's always trying to catch a man. She's a nymphomaniac!

C: She is. She's a fat slag. (group descends into attack on Brenda; colourful adjectives hurled)

MS: Didn't you find the launderette episode funny?

C: Nah, I just thought she was a stupid tart.

J: I thought she was a slut.

(group interview 3A)

(iii) *Character desire*

In almost all group interviews, respondents cited characters that they found attractive or fancied. No character emerged as a favourite in this respect.

MS: Favourite characters?

M (male, 15): Lucy. (lecherous laugh, Beavis and Butthead style - group, all male, joins in) (MS: Why?) She's gorgeous. (grunts of agreement, more sniggering)

(group interview 4A)

S (male, 15): Only watch it for one thing. (lecherous laugh)

(later in interview) I only watch them to look at the girls. You don't even concentrate on the storyline. That's all there is: look at the cleavage on that!

L (female, 15  
earlier): Glen. (who she likes)

C (female, 15): She fancies Glen. (MS: You don't fancy any?) No. There's no nice-looking guys in either of them.

L: Glen is nice.

C: They're all too surfy and hunky - bad haircuts with highlights job.

L: What about Ryan in *Home and Away*?

C: Aye, he's quite nice. But I wouldn't, like, drop dead. They're a bit sort of...Australian for me.

(group pilot interview 2)

R (female, 15): I think Josh in *Neighbours* is nice.

C (female, 15): Oh aye, he's rather nice.

S (female, 15): I don't think he's nice-looking. I just think he's quite...funny.

MS: What about in *Home and Away*?



J (female, 15): Revhead. (MS: Really?) Aww, he's nice, him.  
(one other agrees) (MS: Why?) He's dead  
sexy.

C: Blake can be alright.

S: Nuh!

R: I don't like his nose. (MS laughs, group laughs)

(iv) *Do the Right Thing*

This emerged as a major theme across the group interviews. Almost all interviewees at various points in the course of an interview made judgements about what a character or characters should or should not have done - in the course of a narrative, or in the characters' fictional lives.

R (female, 15): I hate Michael and Pippa. (MS: Why?)  
Patronising.

C (female, 15): They're so sensible.

J (female, 15): They're too understanding.

S (female, 15  
later): Sophie's (bedroom). You know, the one that's  
pregnant.

C: Oh, that slag.

S: She's not a slag, that's...

MS: Why do you think Sophie's a slag?

C: She's pregnant!

S: That's not fair!

C: Well, she didn't even get row for it. My mum and dad  
would just go...

S: Well, there's not a lot you can do about it, is there?

C: Aye, but she's a slut! I just think she's dirty.

R: If they shout at her she'll just run away...I think you shouldn't call her a slag, anyway, 'cause that's not fair. It's just...

S: It's just life.

(group interview 3A)

MS: Do you think she should have done it? (Pam Willis assisted a dying man in his desire to end his life)

S (female, 15): No. I think if he wanted to do it, that's fair enough - 'cause the guy was supposed to be in a lot of pain and stuff...

D (male, 15): But it wasn't fair asking Pam to do it, though.

S: No, he should have done it himself.

(later in interview)...she's (Feye) all totally falling over herself trying to mate Jim. (laughs, group laughs)

J (male, 15): ...She's a bit silly; because I don't think any woman would do that.

S: I think that's a bit sexist; because you don't...well, I suppose there's Josh. But...you don't see people like Jim...running around trying to catch a woman...And Feye's...totally falling over herself to try and...I think it's sort of good in one way; because if you're, like, totally in love with someone and you want to go and say, hey, I love you, go out with me tonight, sort of thing...be open about it, sort of thing. But I think it's gone too far. (group agrees) Because it's obvious he doesn't want her.

(group interview 4B)

S (male, 13): ...says she doesnae like Meg Bowman's mum 'cause she doesnae let her do anything 'cause she's dying and that.

J (female, 13): That's why she protects her, though.

R (female, 13): I don't like Guy. (MS: Why?) 'Cause he took steroids.

J: Gaby's a bit of a... (MS: A?) A bit of a bitch. (MS: Why?) ...sometimes she is sort of bitchy to...the guy she's going out with.

R (later): ...I thought it was quite bad yesterday, when that man was treating Caroline like a secretary. And I like the way she put the shoes on the desk...I would have done something like that.

J: It's a bad influence on his child (Joe's beer drinking).

MS: Do you think so?

S: Nah, nahhh...

R: I don't like the way...Sophie's pregnant. She's only something like sixteen. And like everyone's so happy about it. I don't think that's right, 'cause it's making it...

S: Neither do I.

R: ...seem like it's alright to go and get yourself pregnant.

J: ...isn't she something like seventeen?

R: ...something like seventeen, but that's still really young.

J: At least it's legal.

R: That's ruinin' the rest of you life, isn't it?

S: No it's not.

R: It is.

(group interview 1B)

S (male, 15): That guy's supposed to be bright. He should have worn something.

(later in interview) If you were pregnant, if you got a lassie pregnant, your life would be over. He never thought to use condoms, did he?

(group pilot interview 2)



### 3. Gender

Gender entered the discussion in almost all group interviews (in fact in all group interviews, given that the findings listed above variously touch upon questions of gender). In most cases it was female respondents who wanted to pursue the question of gender, and who were, mainly, critical of the ways in which gender was treated in *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*.

R (female, 13): The women are always in the kitchen. Where are the men, I wonder.

M (male, 13): Out working. (tone: of course, matter of fact)

R: Oh, so that's what all families should be like?

S (male, 13): That's the women's job, so get on with it.

R: Oh no it's not. And the men are always in the garage, hammering away or fixing cars.

(group interview 1B)

C (female, 15): Women have crap jobs. They're all, like, housewives, Bobby and Pippa and that. The men have, like, high paid jobs...It's just so...sheer stereotypes, know what I mean.

L (female, 15): Nah, that's not true; like, Caroline's got a decent job.

C: Aye, I know, but she's below a man. There's no women bosses.

R (male, 15): What about Dorothy Burke?

MS: What about the young characters and gender?

R: ...I don't think they're that different.

C: The girl gets pregnant. The guy crashes his car. I mean, the same old story. It's been told about a hundred times.

(group pilot interview 2)

S (female, 15): She's pathetic. That is so stereotyped - dizzy, blond hair, bimbo...I mean, it's so...just...I hate that. (MS: You don't like Marilyn, then?) It's not that I don't like her. It's that I don't like the way that they've portrayed her.

(later in interview)...Lucy wants to model. And you'd never have Todd or Josh... (MS: Josh was a stripper, Glen a model)...Yeah, I suppose, but that was different, because...

MS: Are you happy with the representation of teenage girls?

C (female, 15): No.

S: Just the way they dress and everything. Nobody would dress like that...except for me! (laughs)...It's too made up. The girls are all just totally dead pretty. And...that's, like, stereotyping as well...perfect figures, perfect skin...

R (female, 15): Doesn't really bother me. It depends...When Lucy was doing the modelling, Jim went nuts at her; but nobody went nuts at...Josh.

(group interview 3A)

A (female, 16): ...You never see, like, Sally or Sophie coming up with stupid schemes like Adam comes up with...You never see the girls trying anything like that.

(group interview 2B)

D (male, 15): ...They could maybe...a bit more about women's rights...(MS: Don't they do that?) There's a wee bit, maybe, but they don't tend to deal with it that much. They've never had any, or not much discrimination.

MS: Women generally given a raw deal?

J (male, 15): I think it's quite even.

S (female, 15): It is. It's just that sometimes it's more to one side than the other.

J: They don't want to lose, like, all the women viewers...

D: Yeah, they keep it quite balanced.

J: ...I suppose more women watch it, housewives at home during day.

(group interview 4B)

M (male, 13): ...guys don't talk about the programmes at all.

L (male, 13): Yeah, they'll talk about other things, like computer programmes...Guys don't talk about them, but they do watch them.

M (later): ...they always make the girls out to be smarter than the guys. It's always, like, the girls say, I told you that was going to happen. They always know the best way to do things.

L (later): The boys are more interested in computers and remote-controlled cars and stuff (gives example of Josh and remote-controlled boat)...Jim was making an advanced petrol engine, or something. All the girls are interested in other things.

A (female, 13): All the boys tend to get, like, all the action. And the girls really sort of sit at home...

K (female, 13): ...waiting for the guys to finish their action!

M: ...the girls are more interested in who's going out with who.

MS: Do these types of thing annoy you?

K: I don't think it really annoys me. It just shows how unrealistic it is.

A: When it happens, it's really annoying. I think, you never get the girls doing something adventurous like that.

(group pilot interview 1)



#### 4. Family

Most respondents had their evening meal while watching one or both of the programmes. Most watched with at least one member of their family. Almost all interviewees said that their mothers watched *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*, though frequently in a fragmented fashion, combining viewing with domestic work. Most interviewees said that their mothers enjoyed *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*, but not as much as the other soap operas which they watched regularly. Almost all interviewees said that their fathers did not like *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*, even though a number of them watched the programmes often. Again, fathers were said to criticise the programmes because of their poor production values and considered lack of realism.

K (female, 13): My dad hates *Neighbours*, but he watches *Home and Away*...My mum and me watch *Neighbours*.

A (female, 13): My dad doesn't like either of them. He sits and talks right through them...

K: My dad complains throughout *Neighbours*...Mum and me chuck him out. (MS: Why doesn't he like it?) He hates the acting. He thinks it's so corny.

A: My mum thinks they're good because they can show you things about life and how to deal with them. She thinks they're quite realistic. My dad hates them. He thinks the acting's awful. He just talks through them...She (mum) says she like them because they give you two different aspects of things.

L (male, 13): ...My mum sort of watches it in between doing the dishes or something. She usually hears it rather than watches it. It's like that with all of the programmes - she doesn't watch them, she hears them.

(group pilot interview 1)

R (male, 15): Everyone watches except my dad.

C (female, 15): Aye. My grandad hates them...They're more of a women's thing, soap operas. (L, female, agrees)

S (male, 15): My dad doesn't watch them either. He hates them. My mum does occasionally. She just...likes *Cell Block H*, and she watches that when she comes in.

L (female, 15): My big brother doesn't... (C: Yes he does)  
My dad used to hate it, but he's just been made redundant...and now he's into them.  
(group laughs).

C: I don't think men like to admit watching it...that's just it. Nobody's going to say, oh, I really liked *Neighbours* last night. Did you see Madge's outfit? (group laughs)  
Some people say, oh, I dinnae watch it, but I bet they do. It's like wanking. (group bursts into laughter) If you asked ten guys, you'd be lucky if one would admit to wanking. Well, it's the same with *Neighbours*. (admits herself it's a dubious analogy)...but you know what I mean.

(group pilot interview 2)

A (male, 15): My dad keeps on, what you watchin' this shite for?, an' that...he doesnae like the programme much. He says you can tell what's gonnae happen next. He's right, but. It's easy to tell what's gonnae happen.

J (male, 15): Ma dad doesnae (like the programmes). He just sits there and reads the paper; but ma ma' and ma brother do.

(group interview 4A)

P (male, 15): My dad hates *Home and Away* and *Neighbours*.

R (male, 15): My dad says they're crap, but, see, he'll watch them! (laughs)

(group interview 3B)

D (male, 14): Ma ma's keen on *Home and Away*.

J (female, 14): Ma dad (doesn't like the programmes)...He thinks they're...He just shouts at the telly.

D: Ma da' just leaves the room.

G (male, 14): Ma dad doesnae like them either.

D: He sits and watches them, but he doesnae like them. He just sits there and says they're no' real and au that.

J: That's what ma dad does.

R: Ma dad always sits there saying, I hate this programme, it's crap! And then he'll sit and he'll watch it.

J: He goes, are you watching it?, are you watching it? And then goes, was that somebody at the door? And then he turns it over.

(group interview 1A)

## 5. Findings of interest which did not recur

### (i) *Class*

Again, class differences and questions are evident in various ways in the above findings. Class was only raised explicitly by interviewees, though, during two discussions.

M (male, 15): I suppose it's a different...

T (male, 15): It's a break from your ordinary life... (M agrees)

M: ...seein' how somebody else lives an' that.

T; ...we're seeing what it's like in Australia,, or what it's meant to be like.

M: But you always see the good areas, the really posh areas, big hooses an' that...



T: Or the countryside areas in *Home and Away*, like Summer Bay.

M: Yi never see the run doon areas...which I suppose is alright 'cause it cheers yi up, but ken...You dinnae worry about it puttin' yi off yer tea an' that, ken.

(group interview 4A)

S (male, 15): They've got job, right, where they hardly earn a salary, and they live in these massive mansions and have sporty cars. In *Neighbours*, they hardly ever go on about money; but in *Home and Away* they do.

C (female, 15): Yeah, *Home and Away* is money, money...But in *Neighbours* money's no object to them. That's why it's more happy. Lack of money depresses you. Like in *Brookside* they're all broke and living in Barrett houses.

(group pilot interview 2)

(ii) *Naebody'd get out alive*

D (male, 14): Should be set in Edinburgh.

R (female, 14): Nain ai the British ones is set in Edinburgh.

D: 'Part fae Advocates.

R: 'Part fae what?

D: Advocates.

J (female, 14): Should be in Pilton and that (laughs).  
*Naebody'd get out alive!* (laughs, group laughs)

(group interview 1A)

(iii) *Ethnicity*

Only one group referred to the fact that both programmes feature predominantly (often exclusively) white faces.

K (female, 13): ...There's not a coloured person in either

of the programmes. I think that's...I don't know, a bit strange. (some agreement)

M (male, 13): I think they could turn out to be out of place anyway, if you put a coloured person in just for the sake of doing it.

K: Mainly they all agree on the same things. It's not their colour or their race, they just agree on the same things...There's not a mix...

A (female, 13): It might get to people if they put in a coloured person...They might get prejudiced against that person.

K: Maybe if they'd been written in right at the beginning... people from different countries, or anything...They've all been born and bred in Summer Bay.

MS: What about coloured or black people you know. Do they enjoy the programmes?

M: There's a very small amount of coloured people in this school.

(group pilot interview 1)

(iv) *Off the streets*

MS: If someone were to ask you, why do you watch these programmes?, what would you say?

R (male, 15): It's like lookin' fir a joab. Rather than lookin' fir a joab, yi stay on at school, ken what I mean.

(group interview 3B)

(v) *Dropped guard*

The tone of the group interviews was overwhelmingly critical and derisory. Occasionally, though, respondents admitted that there were parts of the programmes they had enjoyed for reasons other than the opportunity to laugh at them and feel superior. A number of respondents referred especially to

*Home and Away's* Blake-Meg romance/leukaemia narrative (shortly prior to the group interviews), saying how much they had enjoyed it, and how well it had been 'done'. *Home and Away*, especially, was said on more than one occasion to treat its narrative issues thoughtfully, and to be 'like life'.

K (female, 13): It's very well done, I think (the programmes' treatment of intimate relations)...Like, Sophie was going out with David and Michael wouldn't talk to them. Now that would happen. (others agree)

(group pilot interview 1)

C (male, 16): Aye, I think sometimes...I just think they're both quite real tae...They're both quite real, aye. You do learn a lotae things.

(group interview 2B)

## INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

Generally, the findings that recur in the group interviews emerge and repeat themselves again in the individual ones. This said, there are important nuances and distinctions in the individual interviews - in particular interviews and between interviewees - which will be considered in the discussion and analysis of the findings. The individual interviews are also at times less easy to divide and categorise than the group ones. Interviewees are able to give longer, more complicated responses which may move across topics and perspectives. The findings are summarised below under three broad headings - realism, characters and findings that did not recur. Again, representative quotes will be provided, and, as well as the one appended, the full transcripts of the interviews are available to readers on request.



## 1. Realism

### (i) Narrative and aesthetic realism

Like the group interviewees, all the individual interviewees said that *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* were generally unreal; that *Home and Away* was the more real of the two; that British popular television drama was more realistic; that the programmes were badly made and excessive; that *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*'s narratives were easy to predict, transparent and repetitive - and that this, again, was a source of criticism, humour and pleasure.

D (male, 16): I think *EastEnders* tends to be maybe a bit more down-to-earth...I don't think everything always turns out roses...in *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* there's always a short story for a couple of weeks, and then it sort of finishes...*EastEnders* is a bit more on-going, and things are more real life, maybe... (MS: Which of the soaps do you prefer?) Well, if I was being sort of more sophisticated, I would say, oh yes, *EastEnders*, because I can relate to it; but on a sort of level where I just want to watch the programme and enjoy it, *Home and Away* or *Neighbours*.

(individual interview 3B)

T (female, 16): ...they (today's episodes) were completely unbelievable...not real life at all. I mean, people don't act like that...

(later in interview)...you think you know what's going to happen, but you want to make sure that it does...it's so...overdone, and underdone; but it's funny...parts of it are supposed to be funny, but other parts, you

know...*Brookside* and *EastEnders* are more...You have to watch them one day to know what's going to happen the next day. It's like a book - you have to be able to follow it; whereas *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* are so...It's sort of light entertainment. You don't really need to carry on where you left off...*EastEnders* and *Brookside*...they're more true to life than *Home and Away* and *Neighbours*, which is probably why I like it (them) more...MS  
(later): Which media do you think get closer to (accurately representing) young people's experiences?

T: Newspaper, probably; but that's only because it's the truth...some magazines...like the problem pages. Maybe some other soap operas, like *EastEnders*. I think that's probably very true to life...a lot more than *Home and Away* and *Neighbours*.

(individual interview 2B)

L (female, 16): ...I think some of the storylines are realistic. They are things that happen in real life, you know, girlfriend-boyfriend stuff...But I think *Neighbours* is...it's really false. You can tell it's acting, I think. But in *Home and Away* you can, you know sometimes I feel like I'm there...it's quite realistic...I mean, I know people that act like that...But *Neighbours* is just too plastic. I just don't like it at all.

(later in interview)...I think it's 'cause I can relate to a lot of the stuff...like the Fin and Blake thing; not that it's actually happened to me; but I know people that it's happened to...

(later)...I enjoy them (*Home and Away* and *Coronation Street*) for different reasons...*Coronation Street* is more realistic than *Home and Away*, probably because it's in this country; and it's more...things that are happening, you know, social issues.

(individual interview 3A)

J (female, 16): ...When Adam came round to get Greg drunk, it was obvious what was going to happen...the next day when Adam came round

and said, oh, you said I could move in. I mean, I still reckon Adam's lying; and for a start, he never said that Greg could move in.

(later in interview)...they're still really...unbelievable; whereas Brookie and Corro are...more realistic...

(later)...You get the soppy little piano bit when Beth's reading her romantic letter...and...the sort of straight tone when someone's spooky or dangerous...which makes it even more unbelievable.

(individual interview 1B)

M (male, 13): ...it's (*Neighbours*) so unrealistic. You'd be better watching *Home and Away*...*Heartbreak High*'s more realistic (than *Neighbours*)...It doesn't really matter if you know what's going to happen in advance (in *Neighbours*), 'cause it's not really exciting; just some parts, like say somebody's going to have a baby, or there's been a big crash, or somebody's been shot - that's quite good...

(individual interview 4B)

## (ii) *Referential realism*

Like the group interviewees, individual respondents repeatedly referred to personal experience and the senses they had of the real world in order to criticise the two programmes. This referential criticism was again generally negative. However, in the individual interviews, respondents were more circumspect in their considerations, and were more prepared to be positive about the programmes.

J (male, 15): Yeah, I think that was very convincing, actually; 'cause I've got a girlfriend that does that...she does all that kind of...stuff...

(later in interview)...the architecture's very normal for Australia (where he had been



recently). It's kind of exciting for Edinburgh...But it's very, very normal for Melbourne.

(individual interview 1A)

T (female, 16): ...I mean, people swear in real life...It's just not believable at all...It just wouldn't happen, because Cameron, I don't think, would take the case. I think he would definitely drop it...like in real life...they have to think about the case before they take it, don't they?...if it was in, like, a normal household, I think she would have been thrown out by now. She wouldn't act like that at all. People would have caught on what she was doing...It's just not true.

(individual interview 2B)

L (female, 16): I don't like the diner, actually; because that isn't realistic to me. I mean, I don't go with my friends to a cafe or somewhere like that. I mean, in Scotland, well, in this area, that doesn't happen; so I don't like that. But, emm, down the beach, I like that, because sometimes I go down the beach and talk to my friends...

(individual interview 3A)

R (female, 13): Well, I mean, in Ramsay Street...I mean, in a normal street, do all these things actually happen within a month or something? Someone gets run over, someone gets pregnant, someone goes bankrupt. I mean, you don't really know about that on your own street, because you're not so...popping into everybody's house, and just walking in so friendly. I'm friends with lots of people on the street, but I'm not...But I suppose they have to show it some way, don't they?...

(individual interview 2A)

N (male, 15): ...I don't think nowadays people would walk in and out of each others' houses like they do, you know, with the crime rate going up and everything...Lassiters...the way the office is done...it just doesn't seem right...the way they've got...two computers only. And then,

after all the work that Gaby had done, she hadn't saved it. Like, when Julie went onto it she wiped the whole lot. You know, that would be saved, the work they'd done...the teacher, Mr Knox. They only seem to have two teachers in that school, Mr Knox and Mr Duncan. They're both taking eight subjects each. The way he acts, you know, ridiculous. The bit when Dorothy Burke...left the school...he turned from being dead nice and gentle to being an evil old sod. I don't think he'd go through a transformation like that overnight...And he's...my headmaster's nothing like that. He's a dopey old fool.

(individual interview 4A)

D (male, 16): I think often females are portrayed as being a bit deeper than males, a bit more sensitive, which may be true in real life. I don't know. A lot of the time males are just...they're sort of good-looking, and that's just their role...and the females do all the worrying, or all the thinking out of all the problems. They have a lot of problems...some of the males, Brad or Rick or somebody...they don't seem to have so many big problems; and they don't seem to worry about them as much. I think, maybe, boys do tend to worry a bit more in real life; or be a bit more deep than they're portrayed as.

(individual interview 3B)

### (iii) *Generic Realism*

At varying degrees of distance, most of the individual interviewees also referred to the texts' generic structures, and to their characteristic structure of relations, in a generally critical fashion.

J (female, 16): ...he was doing really daft things. I mean, he continued to do them...until, you know, he sort of woke up to himself...It's another sort of boring...It's like a Lucy-Brad, really. 'Cause they both like each other, but they're not letting on...Everyone

interferes too much...in each other's lives...There are always far too many people involved in each situation; whereas any place I've ever been everybody likes, you know, prefers to keep themselves mainly to themselves...you know, say something happens to Sophie, then every single person in Summer Bay knows about it, and they've all got their own opinion; whereas here it's kept private, so...In *Neighbours*...they're all too nice to each other. They're either all too nice to each other, or all too nasty towards each other...

(individual interview 1B)

D (male, 16): I think they're supposed to be about domestic crises, sort of; and there's loads of them. I think it could be the crises that happen to hundreds of families all condensed into one, or something. And they're usually families; I mean basically it's families in *Neighbours*, and it's families in *Home and Away*; and it's just the relationships between the families and the friends, sort of connections between them; and just what happens in their life. But it's usually sort of a few things, like school, work, love maybe. I don't think there's a hugely broad range of topics, about, maybe, four or five they keep coming back to.

(individual interview 3B)

M (male, 13): ...everybody seems to fancy each other in the street. Like, Brad fancies Beth, and Wayne fancied Beth. And then Rick fancies Cody, and I think he used to fancy...And it's just, like, they always seem to swap in the street. It's never anybody else, so it's a bit boring sometimes. But I like it when Jim or that has a heart attack, or somebody dies.

(individual interview 4B)

L (female, 16): ...I used to think, when I watched *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*, I used to think most of the characters are the same...especially the girlfriend-boyfriend things. When *Neighbours* had one, so did *Home and Away*...I think that's one of the reasons why I stopped watching it (*Neighbours*), because the storylines were getting to be



sort of the same...

(individual interview 3A)

## 2. Characters

### (i) *Character likes*

All the individual interviewees liked particular characters in the two programmes. However, no characters emerged as common favourites as strongly as in the group interviews. Having a sense of humour, being daft, and being a nice person were again the criteria for liking characters; added to this more frequently in the individual interviews, though, was the perceived acting ability of particular players.

T (female, 16): I like Jim Robinson, 'cause I think he's the best actor in *Neighbours*. He's the more realistic one. In *Home and Away*, I think Ailsa's the best one...I like Blake. I really like Blake. And I quite like Fin.  
(MS: Why do you like Fin and not Karen?)  
Well, Fin's a lot more...She's not a troublemaker; even if she was, she'd be able to play the part a lot better. She's also easy to understand and get on with.  
Blake...I think he's sweet (laughs). I suppose everyone likes Blake, don't they?

(individual interview 2B)

M (male, 13): I like the way Rick acts...He acts funny, the way his face goes...Mrs Mangel, she was good, 'cause people hated her; but she was still quite good...

(later in interview) ...I liked it when Todd was in it. He was good. He was on a lot of other things, so you kind of knew more about what he was like...

(individual interview 4B)

R (female, 13): I like Bobby. I think she's quite a good actress.

(later in interview)...I like Pippa. I think she's good. But sometimes...nah, she's okay; because it's not as if she's doing everything for all the kids; you know, they've got certain days when they all do their own bits, which is good. And they foster children, which I also think's good. And I like Ailsa. She always seems to be there when people need help. I like Bobby, she's good...

(later)...what's she called, Rebecca Emalogaloo or something...she's got her own problem page in some magazine...and that makes me like her a lot more, when I see things like that...

(individual interview 2A)

J (female, 16): I like Brad, 'cause he's so daft, but so nice as well...Dorothy's alright, actually. She's level-headed. She's okay. I quite like Pam Willis, 'cause she can be quite funny...I used to like Caroline Alessi, but now she's in Italy...I like Bouncer.

(individual interview 1B)

L (female, 16): Nick. I like Nick. I like Shane, and Donald. I like the three of them, you know, they're in the same house; 'cause they've all got completely different characters and personalities...I like Finlay, she's nice...I like Bobby. I think Alf Stewart's dead funny. He's, you know, the male stereotype - sexist, chauvinistic. It's quite funny...I like Blake's character. I think he's a nice guy. But he's not, you know, my favourite...

(individual interview 3A)

J (male, 15): ...I just like Brad's character...He's a surfing bum, isn't he...Cameron...I think he's quite good. I don't think he's a very good actor, but I think the character's quite good. And in actual fact, his character, he's a nice guy...Joe! Liked Joe! He was good. I think

he's a very good actor. He's...I've been to Australia...and he's totally Australian. I mean that is an average Australian male, I think. That's just brilliant; with the yute.

(individual interview 1A)

(ii) *Character dislikes*

Although most of the individual interviewees strongly disliked particular characters, no one emerged as singularly as Lucy Robinson in the group interviews. This said, it was almost exclusively female characters which raised respondents' ire. Julie Martin (*Neighbours*) was most frequently referred to as a disliked character, but by less than half of individual interviewees. Characters were generally disliked for being selfish, interfering, or for being bad actors.

D (male, 16): In *Home and Away*, I can't stand Finlay at all. I'm really, like, annoyed about her...studying too hard and all this. I can't be bothered whatsoever...the story might be quite realistic, 'cause I suppose quite a lot of folk go through that exam stress. But I really can't stand her as a character at all...she's just so irritable and...I've never liked her. She's always, well, one minute she was all cheery when Blake was here, she was easy-going; and now she's really irritable and just...Ooh no, I just don't like her at all. She just annoys me intensely...I can't stand Julie Martin! Oohh, I don't know how she can be that annoying. I'm sure she must be annoying in real life. It just can't be an act, because she's just the most...arghhh! I just cannot stand her whatsoever.

(individual interview 3B)

M (male, 13): Julie! (doesn't like)...She can't act...She's nothing like a mum. Like, who'd go out and buy a really expensive TV, ghetto blaster, paint up a completely new room...when they've just gone and broken out of gaol, and been...I



think he tried to stop the stabbing, but made her loony; and she's just gone out and bought him something that probably cost...£1000 or something. And then she doesn't give anything to Hannah and that. She's just nothing like a mum at all...Mrs Daniels (doesn't like), Helen. She's been in it too long. She needs to die.

(earlier in interview)...I really don't like the Jack one, 'cause like every person he sees he kinda goes up and kisses them and says that he knows them. And then like they say, oh yeah, I know you, and then like be fine about it. Like, I just want somebody to hit Jack and say get off, and, like, 'phone the police.

(later in interview)...I usually wait for when anything happens to Hannah, then I watch it. I want her to be killed...She's a pain. She can't act. My wee sister's better at acting than her. And my wee sister's the right age. Actually, my wee sister looks like Hannah. That's an insult.

(individual interview 4B)

J (female, 16): ...Blake's a bit of a twat...He's alright, I suppose. Fin is just...a pain...Sophie! Oh, I hate her, honestly...'cause she's a selfish cow; and she's really naive; and she just thinks that she knows, basically, the score on life, when she doesn't have a clue. She's very selfish...Pippa's an airhead (laughs). She...is too bothered. I mean she makes out as if she's concerned about everything, but she's just goddamn nosey.

(individual interview 1B)

L (female, 16): Oh, it's just the way she (Sally, *Home and Away*) talks, just her whole attitude, you know; just early teenager sort of stuff. I mean, I know I was probably like that when I was her age, but she just annoys me; and her accent and everything (laughs). I just don't like her; just the way she moves, sweeps about the house trying to help everybody. It's just miss goody two-shoes. I don't like it...I don't like her (Karen, *Home and Away*) at all. I don't know what it is, the expressions on her face...(MS: No sympathy

for her?) No, none at all. She had...I mean, she wasn't even trying. I mean I know it must have been difficult, but you can at least put an effort in. (laughs)

(individual interview 3A)

T (female, 16): ...I don't like Karen at all, because she's just...I just don't like her, even when she's acting. It's just not a real person...I just can't stand Karen.

(individual interview 2B)

### (iii) *Do the Right Thing*

As in the group interviews, this emerged as a major point of interest for almost all of the individual respondents. Interviewees expressed strong views regarding characters' actions and behaviour, deeming them appropriate, wise, or ill-judged.

L (female, 16): ...I thought it was good in yesterday's episode...when Fin wanted to go with him, but he said no, because of...what had happened...that was mature...and realistic...when they (Fin and Blake, *Home and Away*) first started going out with each other, I thought, it just won't last. They just don't seem right as a couple...(MS: Why?)...I think it was when Blake decided not to stay on at school, and he left. I thought it was quite immature of him...But Finlay's going to pursue an academic career, going to university and all that. She's quite mature. I think girls being more mature than boys at our age, it really shows in the story. And just the two of them, they're different personalities. I just don't think they go together at all.

(later in interview)...when Frank came back, my friend Jenny said they should get back together and she should forget about Greg. But I was like, no, she should go with Greg...(MS: Why?)...probably because I've watched it for so long, and I know that



Frank ran off and left her; and now he's coming back just because he's split up with Ruth. And he's just using Bobby, and I didn't like that. She was better off with Greg, who really liked her, loved her; and Sam as well, she'd fostered him. I thought...it would be nice for her to have a stable family, a stable home and all that. But Jenny wanted her to have an adventure, but I didn't think it was right. I didn't think it fitted into the storyline at all, you know, Bobby's character...it's not really setting morals...or what some people would class as morals...some people would say, Bobby shouldn't have got involved with Frank...But in a way it's teaching us, or teaching some people, you should really...think about what you're doing. In these sorts of situations you should really think about who you're better off with...if someone, like, was in that situation when they were watching, they'd probably think twice about what they were doing. Just...little things like Alf going off to America. Some stubborn old man sitting watching it might think, mmm, maybe I should do something with my life! Maybe I should go and travel. I think it's a cause of inspiration for some people...I think it's for everyone. 'Cause, like, Pippa and Michael...they're trying to bring up Sally and Fin and everyone in a sort of parent way. So if a child's watching it, if I'm watching it, and me and my mum have fallen out, I might think, mmm, yeah, that's good. So I think it's good for...teenagers, and I also think it's good for...parents as well, 'cause they can see the teenagers' points of view. They might think, oh, maybe I shouldn't have said that...people watching it...might think, I should do that; or I'm like that, I should change. But I don't think it's right to totally model yourself on someone...but I think it's good. I think it's for every age group...

(individual interview 3A)

D (male, 16): ...No one would do that, really, just say, ohh, can I just go to bed with you, just to lose my virginity? I think that's stupid. That just wouldn't happen at all.



(later in interview) I thought that was quite good... quite like real life; because people just, at first they almost gave her a row for being pregnant. They didn't think about...what it meant, at first. They just sort of, oh, that's wrong. And I thought it was quite good how Todd and Phoebe...stuck together...and it was good that everyone rallied round her...

(later)...I just thought it was really bad, the way she (Karen, *Home and Away*) treated everyone...it might be quite like real life. Ailsa and Alf's failure to deal with her might be a bit bad, 'cause she...walked all over them, really. If adults were shouting at me, I wouldn't just talk back to them.

(individual interview 3B)

T (female, 16): ...the way Sophie acts, it's just not like a young mother would act...she might give up her daughter, but the way she acts...she's really selfish...I don't think people are like that.

MS: What about Phoebe and her pregnancy?

T: I think that was much better done, probably 'cause I liked it because she stuck to her guns and did what she wanted. I think it was much more realistic than Sophie. I don't think Sophie would give her baby away, definitely not...(I did sympathise) with Sophie, 'cause I knew that it was hard for her - she had to give up the baby. I don't know how she felt, but I could imagine. But I could also understand Pippa as well, definitely.

MS: What do you think of Pippa as a character?

T: I think she's a good mother, a really good mother; but she's a bit...over-protective...

(individual interview 2B)

J (male, 15): I think she's (Lucy, *Neighbours*) spoilt. She looks down on people...Well, her character does...I don't think she should tell Brad what to do...It's his life...

(individual interview 1A)

R (female, 13): Well, I thought...if it was real I would

think it was the right thing for him to do...to go and find out about his real family, 'cause that's what I would have done. But I didn't like the way Alf reacted. I thought that was just being selfish...maybe a few people would agree with Alf. I suppose, like, he would feel hurt for Blake going away; but he's got to understand that that's his father...

(later in interview)...I think she's (Sophie, *Home and Away*) really selfish sometimes. I mean, fair enough, she's just had a baby, she's got a lot to cope with; but that time when Pippa wanted to go out and get a job, and she was like, oh, you're being so selfish. I think that was really bad of her to do that.

(individual interview 2A)

### 3. Findings of interest which did not recur

#### (i) Gender

Again, many of the above responses are about gender representations and identities. In an explicit way, though, gender was raised by individual respondents less frequently than in the group interviews.

L (female, 16): ...I think Alf tends to put some females in the series a bit down, like Ailsa sometimes. But I think he respects her; and, like, she's running the diner, and she's a businesswoman and all that. But at the same time you never see him cooking or anything like that - it's always her. I think it's kind of unfair, you know, she's doing all this work and he comes in and just sits on his backside and lets her do it. But I think from a general point of view, I don't think it's very sexist.

(individual interview 3A)

N (male, 15): I think it's an alright character (Pam Willis, *Neighbours*). It portrays more or less what it's like to be a mother, you know, how she copes with her family and stuff.

(individual interview 4A)

(ii) *Problem pages*

Two male interviewees said how much they enjoyed reading the problem pages in magazines aimed at young women.

J (male, 15): I like the problem pages. I love the problem pages. That's the only bit I read, really. You know, what should I do? They're great. It's very entertaining. It's the only good part of their magazines, really.

(individual interview 1A)

M (male, 13): ...And there's this girl in my class...she brings *Just Seventeen*. They've got some good things on fashion in it, but most of the boys in the class go straight to the problem page...the girls'll look at the fashion and that, whereas the boys turn straight to it (the problem page) and read it. And usually they read *Just Seventeen*, 'cause they've got the best problem page.

(individual interview 4B)

(iii) *Class and setting*

D (male, 16): I think there's a certain glamour about Australia that everyone feels. And they're always set in nice, middle-class homes. All the people are relatively good-looking and well-off; nice clothes, bright clothes. Their accents are...interesting. *Home and Away*'s beside the sea, and you always see sort of surfers going past, you know, that you might see in magazines or whatever.

(individual interview 3B)



(iv) *Deeper meaning*

J (female, 16): ...I don't think there are that many morals. I mean, any morals that there are are just spoken ones that are said throughout the programme...they're only ever said. There's, you know, no hidden meaning behind what happens.

(individual interview 1B)

(v) *Value*

D (male, 16): ...I think they're just regarded as sort of silly...silly teenage programmes. You know, whenever you talk about, or teachers or whoever talks about rubbish on the telly, they always say, oh, *Home and Away*, or *Neighbours*, or something like that. They're just not regarded highly at all - and I don't think they should be. (laughs)

(individual interview 3B)

(vi) *Music and the Fancying imperative*

L (female, 16): ...the music they were playing when Blake and Fin were saying goodbye, that was really trying to put on a boo hoo hoo sort of thing. But it didn't work for me, 'cause I don't really fancy Blake, you see. But...(L's friend) will be sitting crying her eyes out. But I think all this...(melodramatic) music, I think they do that too much sometimes...

(individual interview 3A)

D (male, 16): ...I think it stands out (the music in *Home and Away*). And they have songs that sometimes relate to what's happening; like if Shane's on, they have this song about a bad boy or something. (laughs) It's just ridiculous. And at the end of scenes the music's always turned up - it's like Go! Go! Go! (shouts and laughs)...it's just ridiculous. It's awful.

(individual interview 3B)

(vii) *Character growth*

J (male, 15): ...Ailsa, I would say she was usually right. Bobby is now. She didn't used to be. She used to be a little tearaway...Now she's kind of married and...settling down. She's usually right.

(individual interview 1A)

(viii) *Off the streets*

M (male, 13): *Biker Grove*. Yeah. The kids are a lot in that, 'cause it's an all-kids thing. It's like...a youth club, where you can go...anytime...They should have one up here, 'cause there'd be more people off the street and in there, and it'd be fun.

(individual interview 4B)

(ix) *Meg and Blake*

T (female, 16): Oh, I liked that. That was the best part of *Home and Away*, I thought. (MS: Why?) It was just so...sort of heart-warming, you know what I mean. It was really nice, and it wasn't overdone. And Meg was a really good actress. She was really good. And Blake, I think, was good in that part as well. I thought they were excellent.

(individual interview 2B)